



## A Political Economy Analysis of Education in Nepal.

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# **A Political Economy Analysis of Education in Nepal**

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## ACRONYMS

CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DDC	District Development Committee
DEO	District Education Officer
DEO	District Education Office
DFID	UK Department for International Development
EC	European Commission
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCED	National Centre for Educational Development
PCF	Per Capita Funding
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
SSRP	School Sector Reform Programme
UCPN-M	United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
VDC	Village Development Committee
WFP	World Food Programme

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report provides a political economy analysis of the education sector in Nepal. Political Economy Analysis (PEA) is *'concerned with the interaction of political and economic processes in society: the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time.'*<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this particular study was to understand how political and economic factors affect the implementation of the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) 2009-15.
2. The study was commissioned by the Delegation of the European Union to Nepal. The international consultants were funded by DFID and the EC and the findings will also inform a larger EC PEA study of education in a number of countries. Funding for the national consultants was provided by UNICEF and transport during field studies was provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) and Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RNN).
3. Nepal has experienced a number of significant political changes since the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2006 which brought to an end the decade-long 'People's War'. The ending of the monarchy led to multi-party elections in 2008 and has seen the United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (UCPN-M) elected as the largest political party in a new Constituent Assembly tasked with drafting a new Constitution. This process has been delayed by serious problems notably federalism and the future of the Maoist People's Liberation Army (PLA). Interim governments have remained weak and divided, with the result that progress on implementation of the CPA has been slow.
4. Education policy has been developed within this uncertain and changing political context. The SSRP was developed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) as a long-term plan to improve the quality of basic and secondary education. It builds on previous programmes such as Education For All (EFA), the Secondary Education Support Program (SESP), and Teacher Education Project (TEP). The cost of the SSRP over the first five years was estimated to be \$2.6 billion. The Government of Nepal has committed over \$2 billion and development partners have pledged \$0.5 billion. However, the status of the SSRP remains unclear as it has not been enacted into law.
5. The SSRP has a number of elements, including reforms to the structure of schooling and movement towards decentralised management of schools, changes to the training, recruitment and professional development of teachers, and a range of measures to increase equitable access and participation. Although the Ministry of Education is seeking to push forward with the SSRP the necessary amendment to the Education Act has not yet been approved by the government and so its status remains unclear. In addition the education sector suffers from structural problems which inhibit the development and implementation of new policies. A reason for this PEA study is that, *'There is increasing recognition that blockages for effective reform at the sector level (including for delivery, planning and procurement) can be political and that technical*

<sup>1</sup> See [www.oecd.org/dac/governance/politiceconomy](http://www.oecd.org/dac/governance/politiceconomy)

*solutions alone may not be enough.*' (Joint Donor Workshop DFID, EC, UNDP, World Bank, 2009). 'Political' here means not only top-level political contention but also the interests of actors at different levels, including teachers.

6. The literature suggests that PEA can be conducted at three levels (macro-level country analysis, sector-level analysis and problem-driven analysis) but these need to be brought together and related to each other. This study accordingly seeks to integrate three levels of analysis. The macro-level analysis uses the DFID Strategic Conflict Analysis methodology to identify the dominant political economy drivers in Nepal. The education sector analysis identifies structural issues, institutions and actors operating within the sector from a political economy perspective and how these influence policy implementation. The third level is problem-based analysis<sup>2</sup> based on intensive engagement with a range of stakeholders to identify obstacles to progress in the sector generally and in the SSRP.
7. There are a range of methodological challenges associated with this approach, not least the sensitive and often hidden nature of the information being sought. The approach is dependent on a highly developed understanding of political context and the interpretation of perceptions and motivations of various agencies and actors. The main method for achieving a balanced view has been through triangulation of information among many different stakeholders (and within the study team) and focusing on interests that might cause biases in the information being given.
8. The initial plan was to focus on three specific areas of SSRP policy. These were governance (political influence, decentralisation, school management committees); identify factors (gender, language, inclusion of indigenous groups); and teachers (training, recruitment, employment and professional development). Whilst these were indeed important issues from a political economy perspective, it soon became clear that the use of more open-ended questions about perceptions of educational changes had a number of advantages. In particular, it meant that respondents were able to identify the issues they considered most relevant. With a focus on fundamental issues and interests, the study was drawn towards a wider assessment of the education sector rather than a narrow focus on the SSRP.
9. The study was completed in three phases (January-March 2011) followed by a period of consultation and feedback. Phase 1 was a desk-based study of the political economy of Nepal (macro-analysis) and a preliminary description of the education sector (sector analysis). Phase 2 was a process of corroboration and deepening the analysis with stakeholders in Kathmandu and focusing the questions for field research. Phase 3 involved field work in each of the five development regions of Nepal (Central, Eastern, West, Mid-West and Far-West). The initial draft was shared with officials from the Ministry of Education and their feedback has helped to provide a more rounded report.
10. Field visits were made to 27 schools (21 government and 6 private) across 10 Districts: *Kathmandu* and *Dhanusha* (in the eastern Terai), *Sankhuwasabha* (in the eastern hills),

<sup>2</sup> World Bank (2009) *Problem-driven Governance and Political Economy Analysis*

*Kapilvastu and Rupandehi (in the western region), Banke and Rolpa (in the mid-western region where the armed conflict originated), Dadheldura and Kailali Districts (in the far west, the most remote and impoverished region).* Altogether the study involved consultations with approximately 50 people during meetings in Kathmandu and 225 stakeholders during the field visits.

## SUMMARY OF RECENT POLITICAL HISTORY

11. The Maoist political group withdrew from democratic politics in 1996 and launched a 'People's War' starting from remote rural areas and drawing on the grievance of very poor and excluded people, including a high proportion of women. By 2006 the situation had reached a stalemate in which the Maoists largely controlled the rural areas and the government held the towns. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement led to a new interim Constitution and election of a Constituent Assembly tasked with drawing up a permanent Constitution. The Maoists emerged as the strongest political force but without an overall majority. The monarchy had become unpopular following a 'royal massacre' in 2001 and was abolished but the three main political parties have not been able to provide stable government. Instead, short-term rent-seeking and patronage politics have increased.

## MAIN FINDINGS

12. **The macro analysis** highlights the importance of political patronage as the main political economy factor influencing the development of education in Nepal. This is particularly pervasive in Nepal because of a continuing history of centralisation of power. Efforts to promote the 'forms' of governance are often outweighed by hidden political pressures ('informal governance') and efforts to promote decentralisation are thwarted by centralising tendencies. There has been some improvement in relation to direct social exclusion but patronage systems (or 'informal governance') create less visible barriers to social mobility, leading to frustration and inefficiency.
13. Geopolitical factors relating to the rivalry of India and China make it unlikely that there will be any significant change from the current situation of weak government. India, in particular, often switches its support between political actors in order to ensure that no strong government emerges to challenge its hegemony. The political parties remain focused on internal competition and have done little to develop policies on issues such as education. This has not weakened the control of central institutions but has led to a kind of national paralysis. At local and District levels, elections have not taken place since the last elected bodies expired in 2002. Functions are performed solely by government officials who often come under the influence and control of the political parties. But local voices and opinions are excluded because the parties operate on the basis of their centrally-controlled national strategies, ignoring the needs of local people.
14. **Education Overview.** From almost no education system in the 1950s, Nepal has developed an extensive network of schools now reaching practically all areas (approximately 33,000 primary schools with nearly 5m students and nearly 8,000 secondary schools with nearly 1.2m students in 2010). Many of these schools are very small and in very remote locations, making the issue of teacher deployment difficult and sensitive. Unfortunately, government control over teachers is minimal. The affiliation of



teachers to political unions protects them from control by schools and the Ministry. This results in lack of discipline. Irregular attendance, absenteeism and unwillingness to cover for other teachers often cause students to miss their studies. Attempts by Head Teachers to control teachers are likely to be treated as political.

15. Political links with teachers open the way for direct political interference and competition in schools. The local appointment of teachers is a particularly sensitive issue with each party seeking to put forward its own candidates. Since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), School Management Committees have become highly politicised, especially in the *Terai* (plains), and political parties have mobilised support for elections to these bodies around their own narrow interests rather than education policies and objectives. As a result, government schools are much less efficient than private schools and there is a danger of a deepening social divide between private and public educated children.
16. **Positive Achievements.** Despite these problems enrolment rates for government schools have increased dramatically (from 81% in 2000 to 93.7% in 2010). In particular, the rate of girls' enrolment is now equal with that of boys and Nepal is now reasonably close to achieving MDGs in relation to formal education. This is remarkable in a society with sharply-divided gender roles. To an extent this success is tempered by an increasing number of boys going to private schools, indicating that parents prefer to 'invest' in boys rather than girls. Secondly the retention and final exam success rates for girls are much less impressive, indicating that girls are often withdrawing from school early, especially in the *terai* (plains). A further major achievement is that social discrimination on caste lines has considerably decreased. These successes reflect efforts and changes within the education sector but are also attributable, in part at least, to pressures from the Maoist movement (which enlisted large numbers of girls/women and cadres from socially excluded groups (notably *dalits*)).
17. **Teachers and Teaching.** The current rigidity in deployment of permanent teachers is the key weakness of the government school system and the situation is protected by unions and political parties. Teachers who are centrally employed enjoy security of employment and pension rights that create a sense of impunity for their actions in terms of accountability to local populations. This is reflected in high levels of teacher absenteeism, poor timekeeping and the common practice of teachers having second jobs. Many of the older permanent teachers are now ineffective and demoralised. Although they may appear to enjoy an easy protected life, politicisation causes deep division within schools and teachers may feel that they have lost respect from students and communities. Schools face a particularly serious shortage of teachers of Science, Maths and English and these are the subjects that students are most likely to fail in the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination. Although Head Teachers are limited in their ability to manage teachers by unionisation, there are examples of outstanding Head Teachers who exert control through their own charisma and hard work. Some of the best government schools offer a very high standard of education, and not simply exam success. In short, it is not the formal system that undermines education but the informal pressures arising ultimately from patronage and politicisation.

- 18. Education Standards and Examinations.** Development Partners in Nepal make a significant financial contribution through the Education Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp). They use a number of measures as key indicators of progress, notably enrolment of girls, as noted above. However, all such statistics are prone to manipulation around the interests of elements within the education system. In particular, SMC Chairpersons and Head Teachers have an interest in maintaining high numbers of students (at least in the records) in order to increase the Per Capita Funding. Examination success is also a key factor. In the case of Nepal this focuses on the SLC exam taken at the end of Grade 10. For at least a decade, cheating has been a feature of this exam and it now appears that this is taking place on a systemic basis, at least in some areas, encouraged by teachers and officials who feel pressurised to improve the SLC success rate.<sup>3</sup> This may be partly a result of pressures from DPs expressing concern about low pass rates. In 2005 and 2006 only about a third of government school students passed the exam. Subsequently the pass rate rose dramatically to around two thirds and then in the current year fell back to less than half. Throughout this period DPs have continued to ask why returns on education investment in the government sector are so much lower than in the private sector.
19. One way in which officials can adjust exam success rates is by allowing discretion in the case of near-passes. Processes of 'liberal progression' have been gradually extended allowing examiners to add more and more 'grace marks' to allow students to reach the level required for a pass. Another is to offer the opportunity to re-sit examinations for subjects that had been failed in the first round of exams. Both these methods have been used increasingly. In the case of exam re-takes the success rates are implausibly high, suggesting that distortions are particularly extreme in this practice and may involve a combination of cheating, mark upgrades and outright re-writing of the figures.
20. A problem with institutionalised cheating is that it removes the incentives for effective learning both from teachers and students. There is a danger that the education system, while putting forward a vision of progress based on merit, actually promotes very negative stereotypes: a government job does not entail the need to work; working hard at studies brings less success than bribery etc. Ultimately the politicisation of the education system perpetuates itself by adjusting each new generation to the same system and reinforcing the power of 'informal governance' in society.
- 21. Decentralisation.** The implications for education of a new federalist Constitution remain unclear because the details of the arrangement remain highly contentious. One possibility is that the federal states would be based on ethnic and linguistic divisions, which may have profound implications for the role of languages in education. There is also uncertainty about what federalism would mean for political control of education, the governance of schools and authority over decision-making such as employment of teachers, content of the school curriculum and quality control of examinations and assessment. All these issues have profound political ramifications and may be hotly contested for a long time to come. This indicates that fundamental problems such as teacher deployment will not be addressed.

<sup>3</sup> Mathma and Bista (2006) *Study on Student Performance in SLC*, Ministry of Education and Sports –Education Sector Advisory Team, Kathmandu

22. **The Role of District Education Officers (DEOs).** The influence of political parties on education issues means that DEOs are in a difficult position. The fieldwork suggests that their time is preoccupied with responding to complaints, rather than taking a lead in implementation of education policy in the local district. Without an amendment to the Education Act, DEOs are reluctant to put much effort into implementation of the SSRP. DEOs have to sanction school finances and act as a central point in disbursement of government funds. Schools have an incentive to inflate the number of students in order to increase their grant-in-aid (Per Capita Funding). The monitoring and accountability functions of DEOs can become difficult or even dangerous. Because all such issues are politicised, DEOs may be under pressure to sanction malpractices rather than run into direct opposition to political parties that have strong links to the centre and perhaps to the Ministry. Similarly, political pressures make it difficult for DEOs to bring about quality improvements in schools. Teachers can refuse to take notice of DEOs, Supervisors and Resource Persons because of their political 'protection' through the unions.
23. **Private Schools.** Remittances from migration (mainly to the Gulf States, Malaysia and India) are fuelling a trend towards private education based mainly on English medium. English-medium is viewed both as a status issue and as a route to more lucrative forms of employment (e.g. in aid agencies) or study abroad. The success of private schools derives primarily from stronger control of teachers by the school management. Political unions are usually kept out of the school. The qualifications and training of teachers and the quality of infrastructure may often be lower in private schools than in government schools but the pass rate in the crucial SLC exam is nearly twice as high (approximately 90%). Both types of school use rote-learning methods but in private schools the teachers have much stronger incentives for exam success – otherwise they are likely to lose their job. Government school teachers have no such incentive because their jobs are secure and protected by the unions. Parents are more likely to engage with private schools than government schools but usually in relation to their own children rather than in general management. They treat education as an economic investment and may pursue different strategies in relation to different children. It is widely argued that because education officials and teachers generally send their children to private schools they have less commitment to the public system.
24. **School Management Committees (SMCs).** Although SMCs are supposed to be bodies elected from among parents and including representation of women and Dalits, our fieldwork indicates that the SMC is commonly dominated by the Chairperson, especially in the *terai*. This is not only because the Chairperson may prefer to act alone but also because historically public education has been viewed as a 'gift' from the state and parents often feel reluctant to question what they are given for nothing. In the schools that are managed by the communities, the SMC Chairperson in effect controls the school assets in collaboration with the Head Teacher although he (we found no case of 'she') may require sanction from the DEO on some issues. In particular, the SMC Chairperson plays an influential role in the appointment of locally-recruited teachers and with the rapid expansion of schools this has become a common practice. In the *terai* (plains) this has become one of the main reasons for seeking election as SMC Chair and leads to bitter and sometimes violent struggles. In more remote and less politicised hilly areas, social status may be a greater factor encouraging people to take up the onerous task of SMC

Chair and there are some cases of genuine philanthropists concerned to improve children's education.

25. Increased public demand for education together with the SSRP plan to extend basic (compulsory) education by three years to Grade 8 have made SMC Chair posts more and more powerful. In addition, there is increasing demand for Higher Secondary schools (Grades 11&12). All this adds to opportunities for teacher recruitment and infrastructure development. In many cases funds are provided by village and district level councils. Since these bodies are not democratic but run by officials, there is little transparency and accountability in relation to their decisions and this opens the way for the distortions of 'informal governance'.
26. **The Role of Education in Identity Development.** The demise of the monarchy has opened the way for greater recognition of diversity in religion and culture. The notion that Nepal's diverse peoples had happily submitted to the 'Hindu Kingdom' could now be challenged and a discourse relating to historical and cultural suppression began to emerge. School textbooks have been revised to remove the worst stereotypes relating to history, religion and culture and respect for diversity is now included in the syllabus under the heading of Peace Education.
27. Some leaders of indigenous ethnic groups favour the development of education in the 'mother tongue' while others fear that it would isolate them from wider society. The debate has been given impetus by the commitment to federalism by the political parties and in the current Constitution. There is a possibility that federal states could be based on language groups other than Nepali and that those languages could be adopted as the language of instruction in schools. There is a danger that objective analysis and debate around the issue of 'mother tongue' may be overtaken by political arguments and by short-term concessions that could have serious consequences for the education system.
28. **Gender Issues.** As noted above, the enrolment of girls in public education has significantly improved but drop-out rates remain high. There is a risk that the DP focus on MDGs, coupled with scholarships and other incentives from aid agencies,<sup>4</sup> may be causing a distortion in the system. It is reported that girls sometimes enrol for several different schools in order to collect the scholarships. This may undermine the value of education. The importance of women as role models in schools has received much less attention from DPs. Although the proportion of women teachers now approaches a third, they are invariably placed in lower classes of Primary schools and are very rare in higher classes. Female Head Teachers are an extreme rarity even though studies indicate that girls do better under women teachers.

<sup>4</sup> Notably, WFP provides cooking oil for girls enrolling. To a lesser extent the same problems also apply in case of incentives for *dalits* and other disadvantaged groups

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

- 29. The General Role of Development Partners.** In a context in which 'informal governance' often drives out 'formal governance' it is important not only for DPs to support and encourage formal educational governance (as laid down in the regulations) but also to root out and challenge distortions that arise from personal and political interests. Although this requires considerable tact and diplomacy and may sometimes appear confrontational, such an approach may be welcomed by officials who are caught in the grip of a politicised patronage system.
30. As a fundamental prerequisite of such an approach DPs must equip themselves with reliable and independent sources of information. Unfortunately the official sources are unreliable because they become distorted by the effects of incentives. In particular there is a tendency to inflate figures for students attending school in order to increase funds for scholarships and the Per Capita Funding. Until 2006 the DPs operated an independent monitoring system that provided a cross-check on official data and this helped DPs to identify real problems in the system. But in 2007 the DPs discontinued this activity, apparently on the basis that there was no significant difference in the figures for that year. There had been considerable differences in the previous years and this decision seems to have been taken hastily. Political Economy Analysis indicates that official data is bound to be affected by hidden factors and therefore it is absolutely essential to have an independent check.
31. Secondly, DPs should not allow themselves to be boxed into a corner by the dominance of the Paris Declaration principle of alignment with government, nor by their formal position of support to government within the Education SWAp. Nepal should still be regarded essentially as a 'fragile state' especially in terms of political turbulence, governance and the possibility of renewed violence and conflict. This should remain the mode of assistance at least until a new Constitution and directly elected government are installed. By implication, DPs should be ready to use a mixture of instruments, both state and non-state, to implement their programmes. In the absence of full democratic government at all levels there is still a considerable need for independent monitoring and support through capacity building. In the case of education, NGOs may still be needed to help develop parental involvement, to help SMCs to manage themselves and to intervene in disputes that may damage the education process. Above all, NGOs still need to play a role in ensuring that SMCs and Head Teachers are accountable to local people by, at a minimum, conducting 'social audit' processes.
32. Thirdly, this PEA study shows the dangers of too much focus on specific targets at the expense of other aspects of the system. DP focus on enrolment rates, especially for girls, has drawn attention away from reasons why girls may drop out. The use of incentives such as scholarships and free food may produce changes in key statistics but may not bring about fundamental and sustainable change.
33. Fourthly, DPs could do more to encourage debate among the political parties and challenge them to come up with policies to reduce the politicisation of schools. DPs should recognise that assistance through a SWAp mechanism entails a risk of handing

over patronage opportunities to the political entities in charge of education. This reached an extreme in the case of appointment of temporary teachers and DPs took effective action to limit abuses. Other negative practices that deserve direct and sustained DP attention are:

- Imbalances in class sizes because of problems relating to deployment of teachers;
- Systemic cheating in exams;
- Reinstatement of local elections at village and district levels.

Although DPs may like to argue that some of these issues are out of their control (or even of the Ministry of Education), the SWAp mechanism makes DPs responsible for the education system as a whole, not just specific technical aspects.

34. Fifthly, DPs should insist that local elections should be held as the most realistic first step towards improvement of school management. Currently all the local political pressures centre on the school. If elected local governments resume functioning political debates will, to an extent at least, go back to their proper arena. This will also provide a proper mechanism for local oversight of schools and control of SMCs. Elected local government bodies are a prerequisite for decentralisation of education.

35. **Specific Issues in relation to the SSRP.** Even though the SSRP lacks legal impetus, DPs can build on its positive agenda especially in relation to the following issues:

- **Monitoring of private schools.** The SSRP makes little reference to private schools but the social divide between public and private education is a matter of considerable importance and deserves to be more closely followed both by government and DPs;
- **Payments in government schools.** Government schools are increasingly engaged in fundraising activity both from local councils and from parents and local communities. Under the Constitution, basic education is to be provided free but this is not entirely realistic and could deter parents from involvement with the schools. Making a contribution encourages participation and helps to develop a sense of 'rights'. While DPs may be constrained by global commitments, they should avoid a strong push for 'free public education'. This would acknowledge that until fundamental faults of the system (notably teacher deployment) are addressed, communities will have to adjust and manage as best they can;
- **Teacher performance.** There is a substantial body of research that highlights the central role of school leadership and teacher effectiveness as the main factors contributing to improvements in the quality of education.<sup>5</sup> It appears that despite a high level of training and further regular training inputs, teachers rarely put the results into practice in the schoolroom;
- **The Role of examinations.** It still appears that the examination system gives a premium to rote-learning and to that extent favours the private school approach. This undermines government schools and also reduces the quality of education in private

<sup>5</sup> For an overview see Harris, A. and Muijs, D. (2011) *Teacher Leadership: A Review of Research* accessed at [www.teachers.org.uk/files/word/t-leadership-review.doc](http://www.teachers.org.uk/files/word/t-leadership-review.doc)

schools. The incentives derived from the current examination system deserve further reappraisal;

- **Education in the 'Mother Tongue'.** DPs must be very careful about applying global lessons without taking account of the political forces surrounding this issue. There are strong reasons, relating to respect for diversity, for extending the provision of education in the 'mother tongue' and the teaching of local languages as a special subject. DPs must simply be careful that they do not get drawn into support of political forces in the absence of any firm national basis for taking this issue forward;
- **Education in English medium.** There is an increasing practice of teaching in English medium in government schools. This is allowed by the regulations but has hitherto been quite rare. DPs should recognise that this may offer the chance to break down the increasing divide between government and private schools and to maintain government schools as the source of education for all social groups but this will not, of course, address the issue of quality education in government schools

## INTRODUCTION

### Purpose and Process

The Government of Nepal (GoN) has introduced a School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) 2009-2015. Although this is still not enacted in law it represents new directions in education with an extension of compulsory basic schooling and a strong emphasis on quality of education. It builds on from Nepal's 'Education For All' (EFA) approach during the previous years.

The objectives of the study, as stated in the Terms of Reference (see Annex 1), place the SSRP within a wider context. In summary they are to-

1. Analyse the political, economic and social context into which the SSRP is being introduced and implemented;
2. Map out stakeholder interests, power relations and decision-making at different levels;
3. Identify obstacles to educational policies, programmes and reforms;
4. Examine the role of development partners (DPs);
5. Suggest ways of making improvements in the education sector.

The study was completed in three phases. Phase 1 was a desk-based study of the political economy of Nepal (Macro-analysis) and a preliminary description of the education sector (Sector analysis). Phase 2 was a process of corroboration and deepening the analysis with stakeholders in Kathmandu and focusing the questions for field research. Phase 3 involved field work in selected Districts of Nepal. The process was iterative, so that results from the field work and Kathmandu consultations fed back into the initial desk-based study to make it sharper and more relevant. In parallel with this process the team has gathered together relevant documents which are now held on a web platform.

Section One of this report presents the Macro-analysis. This examines the political economy of Nepal in a global context and draws primarily on published sources. It also draws on a series of unpublished political economy studies recently commissioned by DPs and covering the health, power, agriculture and police sectors. These have been brought together in a synthesis document (Jones, 2010). Because Nepal's history and recent political developments are presented in these and many other documents we do not repeat them in the main text. Section One ends with a summary of points which are likely to have an impact on the education sector.

Section Two provides a detailed analysis of the education sector, including key educational statistics. It examines key issues in the education sector and some of the essential elements and challenges of the SSRP

Section Three presents the main outcome of the field studies in Nepal in the form of a problem-level analysis. This focuses particularly on what was observed to be happening in contrast with what might be expected according to formal policies and regulations.

Section Four considers the role of Development Partners (DPs) and concludes with some options and possibilities for their future work.



## Political Economy Analysis

OECD (2008) defines Political Economy Analysis (PEA) as *concerned with the interaction of political and economic processes in society: the distribution of power and wealth between different groups and individuals, and the processes that create, sustain and transform these relationships over time.*<sup>6</sup> PEA begins with a comprehensive review of the context and progress from this macro-level analysis downwards through sector-level analysis focused on institutions to ‘problem-driven’ analysis focused on the roles of individual agents within those institutions and structures.<sup>7</sup> As DFID observes, ‘*sector-level and problem-driven analysis pre-supposes that a satisfactory macro-analysis has been completed.*’<sup>8</sup>

The **macro-analysis** in Section One uses the Strategic Conflict Assessment (SCA) method devised by DFID<sup>9</sup> both because this was suggested in the TOR and also because it presents a neutral, mapping approach which can be easily adapted to our ultimate focus on the Education Sector-

### SCA method of mapping the structural causes of tension

	Security	Political	Economic	Social
International				
National				
District/Federal				
Local				

**Sector level** analysis carried out with a focus on formal institutions and current policies.

Education sector - History - Current Statistics - SSRP - Policy Issues	Structures	Factors
	<b>Institutions (formal)</b>	Factors
	Actors	Factors

Both the World Bank<sup>10</sup> and the DFID<sup>11</sup> approaches to political economy analysis identify three kinds of drivers: *structures, institutions and agents*. According to DFID<sup>12</sup>, ‘*structures*’ are ‘*long-term contextual factors....{which are}... not readily influenced.*’ Most of the macro-analysis falls into this category. The analysis of ‘*Institutions*’ focuses on the interests that drive institutions and (following DFID) these can be divided into ‘formal’ (what is supposed to happen) and ‘informal’ (what really happens). The problem-driven analysis focuses on how these issues actually play out on the ground and through individual *agents*. The macro-

<sup>6</sup> See DFID (2009) p4. For a wider review of PEA methodologies see GSDRC (2008).

<sup>7</sup> DFID (2009) p14 This has been vindicated in the current study: the impact of geopolitical factors can be clearly traced to the education sector

<sup>8</sup> DFID (2009) p8

<sup>9</sup> DFID (2002)

<sup>10</sup> World Bank (2009) see diagram on p42

<sup>11</sup> DFID (2009) see diagram on p9. The EC approach is consistent with this. See European Commission (2008).

<sup>12</sup> See DFID (2009) p9

analysis establishes a wider context of 'formal governance' versus 'informal governance' which is then reflected in the institutional and problem-driven analysis.

The three levels of PEA (macro, sector and problem) correspond to some extent with a focus on structures, institutions and agents but it is the interaction of these different levels of analysis and types of actor that provides depth and nuance to the process.

### **Methodological Challenges of the process in Nepal**

The SSRP has been underway since 2009 but it still lacks legal status, even though some of its provisions are being put into practice. This makes it difficult to maintain too tight a focus on the SSRP and leads to a wider focus on the education system as a whole. But this may also provide greater opportunities to influence the process as it moves forward.

The literature highlights the sensitive nature of PEA. It attempts to make more explicit those factors that are part of an unofficial discourse and normally less visible. The study of 'informal governance' leads into issues of patronage and corruption, as does the study of the role of individual agents within larger institutions. Staff may be constrained in analysing the institutions they work for in this way. In particular there are fears that negative impressions may tarnish the image of Nepal and that DPs may be persuaded to cut their assistance.

This makes it difficult to conduct PEA studies in an open partnership with government but without the engagement of government the findings are less likely to take effect. In this case an initial draft report was shared with officials on an informal basis and their informal feedback was taken into account in the current revision.

PEA is also highly dependent on the different perceptions of various stakeholders and actors, and for this reason it is extremely important to triangulate data to check for reliability and consistency of perceptions. The main challenges lie in the problem-level analysis. On a number of occasions, the researchers were asked to abstain from taking notes whenever the interviewees felt that they were providing sensitive information. In general, interviewees were willing to talk about distortions within the system, but avoided any direct criticism of government or government policy. On a more positive note, the comparison of areas and schools in the problem-driven analysis was helpful because it led directly into questions of why systems operate differently under different conditions.

Finally it was important to avoid preconceptions and DP biases. Although meeting MDGs is a DP priority it should not detract from other concerns relating to the education system. Throughout this analysis we were careful to recognise that simply increasing the numbers of children registered or the quantity of educational inputs is not enough because education can have both positive and negative impacts.

### **Schedule of Fieldwork**

In Nepal the first week (14-19 Feb 2011) was spent in meetings and interviews with development partners and stakeholder consultations. During this period two extended

consultation meetings were held. The first was a meeting with representatives of DPs and the second involved a presentation on SSRP by a representative of the Ministry of Education followed by group discussion with academics and representatives of local NGOs. Individual interviews were also held with representatives of political parties and development partners (ADB, UNICEF, World Bank). The second two weeks involved field visits.

Nepal has five development Regions made up of 75 Districts. Field visits were made to the following districts in each region over a two-week period (21 Feb – 5 Mar 2011):

1. **Central Region. Kathmandu District** includes the capital and has the highest concentration of private schools. Three schools were visited in Kathmandu district (2 government and 1 private<sup>13</sup>). In-depth interviews were carried out with the DEO (1), MoE officials (2), NCED officials (2), representatives of Teachers' Unions (2), DPs (3) and SMC Chairs/ members (3). Formal meetings were held with head teachers (2), teachers (8) and students (25). Several informal meetings were also held with a number of individuals involved in the educational sector.
2. **Eastern Region. Dhanusha District** (in the Terai) and **Sankhuwasabha District** (in the mountains) were visited. Three schools were visited in Dhanusha where head teachers (2), teachers (15), students (20), SMC Chairs/ members (6), university lecturer (1) and politicians (6) were interviewed. In Sankhuwasabha, a hill district with Rai and Limbu indigenous communities, three schools were visited (2 government, 1 private) plus a technical training centre with 40 students enrolled. During the school visits interviews, focus groups and less formal meetings were held with meetings were held with head teachers (3), teachers (20), students (12), SMC members (3), representatives of teacher unions (2) and DEO (1).
3. **Western Region. Kapilvastu and Rupandehi Districts** were visited where meetings were held in three schools (2 government and 1 private) with head teachers (4), teachers (6), students (2), SMC Chair (2), DEOs (2) and politicians (3).
4. **Mid-Western Region. Rolpa** is a mid-western hilly district where the armed conflict originated and **Banke District** was visited en route. Six schools were visited in Rolpa.
5. **Far-Western Region. Doti** is a far western district remote from power and central politics. **Dadheldura** and **Kailali Districts** were visited en route. In the Far West and Mid-West the original plan was to focus on the hilly Districts of Rolpa and Doti respectively, but the scope of study was increased partly because of necessary travel through other Districts. In total, 15 schools (12 government and 3 private) were visited in these Districts (Doti 6, Dadheldhura 1, Kailali 2, Rolpa 6). Formal meetings were held with VDC Secretaries (2), DEOs (4), Resource Persons/Supervisors (2), SMC Chairs (5), head teachers/teacher groups (15), teacher unions (1), students (3), parents (2), INGOs (1-CARE), NGOs (4) and Development Partners (1, WFP). Many other meetings took place informally in tea shops and while travelling on the road.

<sup>13</sup> Private schools are often referred to as 'boarding' schools although they do not actually provide boarding facilities. Government schools are commonly referred to as public schools.

Tejendra Pherali conducted the field work in Kathmandu, Kapilvastu, Dhanusha and Rupandehi Districts. In Dhanusha, Tejendra was accompanied by Louise Banham and Ajit Karna. Alan Smith travelled to Sankhuwasabha and was accompanied by Shradha Rayamajhi. In the West, Tony Vaux was accompanied by Yogendra Bijukchhen, a former teacher and head-teacher, for visits to Doti, Dadheldhura, Kailali and Banke Districts. For travel in Rolpa District he was then joined by Shradha Rayamajhi.

In total 27 schools were visited (21 government and 6 private) across 10 Districts. Those interviewed are summarised below.

	<b>Regions and Districts Visited During Fieldwork</b>					
<b>Region</b>	<b>Central</b>	<b>Eastern</b>	<b>Western</b>	<b>Mid-West</b>	<b>Far-West</b>	<b>Totals</b>
<b>Districts visited</b>	Kathmandu	Dhanusha Sankhuwasabha	Kapilvastu Rupandehi	Rolpa Banke	Doti Dadheldura Kailali	10
Govt officials	4	-	-	1	1	6
DEOs	1	1	2	2	2	8
Private schools	1	1	1	1	2	6
Govt schools	2	5	2	4	8	21
SMC members	3	9	2	2	3	19
Teacher Unions	2	2	-	0	1	5
Head Teachers	2	5	4	3	5	19
Teachers	8	35	6	2	5	56
Pupils	25	32	2	1	2	62
Parents	-	-	-	-	2	2
NGOs	-	-	-	1	4	5
Dev Partners	3	-	-	1	-	1
Others	2	7	3	1	2	13

In general the views of DEOs, SMC members, Head Teachers and Teachers are well represented in our study. It was more difficult to secure interviews with parents. Pupil voices were represented mostly in group discussion since it was often difficult to secure privacy for individual interviews without teachers present. This may have influenced the opinions that pupils felt free to express.

Altogether the study involved consultations with approximately 50 people during meetings in Kathmandu and 225 stakeholders during the field visits.

## Section One: Macro-level Analysis

### Key Factors relating to conflict and state fragility in Nepal

Studies show considerable agreement about the fundamental factors contributing to conflict and state fragility in Nepal although there is rather less agreement about the relationship of these factors to each other and their relative importance. Using the Strategic Conflict Assessment (SCA) approach<sup>14</sup> the factors are mapped out below and explained in the following sub-sections-

**Table: Underlying Causes of Tension in Nepal -Summary**

	Security	Political	Economic	Social
<b>International</b>	India/China tension	India has an interest in weak governance in Nepal	<i>Aid through government may reinforce 'informal governance'</i>	Global influences increase the demand for rights and equality;
<b>National</b>	History of conflict; No process of truth and reconciliation; Continued presence of Maoist army; Weak police force and rule of law; Culture of impunity in relation to human rights;	<b><i>Weak government asserting centralised control;</i></b>  <b><i>Dominance of informal governance (patronage systems) over formal governance;</i></b>  <i>Politicised unions create inefficiency and exclusion;</i>	<i>Wealth focused in Kathmandu;</i>  Political patronage extends into and constrains business sector;  State services undermined because elite groups use private services;	<i>Private education and English language creates a class barrier affecting employment;</i>
<b>District/Federal</b>	Emergence of armed groups in the terai and Eastern hills;	<i>Lack of elected representation in DDC and VDC;</i>	Difficult to start new businesses without patronage and political links;	<i>Ethnicity, caste, religion mobilised around federalism and political agendas;</i>
<b>Local</b>	Spread of criminal violence;	Use of direct action (bandhas etc);  <i>Politicisation of community-based organisations (SMCs, Community Forest Users' Groups etc);</i>  Women excluded from involvement in local services;	<i>Local elite groups not involved in government services except for profit;</i>	<i>Continued social exclusion against dalits, women and other marginalised groups;</i>

Note: The most important factors are in bold; those especially relevant to this study are in italics.

<sup>14</sup> An SCA was first conducted in Nepal in 2000 and revised in 2002. The analysis became integrated into DFID Country Strategy from 2005.

## 1.1 Security Factors

The security interests of the regional superpowers provide an overarching framework for Nepal, tending to prevent the emergence of strong and stable governments. In particular, India often switches its support between different entities, ensuring that none emerges with unquestioned power. An important implication for our study is that it would be unwise to base development planning in Nepal on the assumption that present difficulties will be quickly resolved and a strong, stable government will emerge. Instead weak government is likely to perpetuate 'informal governance' which is identified in our study as the key and fundamental factor determining development outcomes.

Issues relating to the security forces are highly politicised. The Nepal Army is closely associated with conservative political forces and generally antagonistic towards the Maoists.<sup>15</sup> Even though the command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was handed over to the government-led Special Committee in January 2011, in reality, it leaves the Maoists with the responsibility of the PLA which still remains in cantonments. The government has taken over responsibility for supporting this force from the UN. The maintenance of this force together with a very large army is a major drain on state resources. Without the promised amalgamation of Maoist forces into the army and/or other security forces, the security situation remains precarious and there is a continued threat of violence. Although a resolution of the issue now seems close, the threat of mobilising PLA cadres may continue to haunt political processes leading to continued weak and divided government.

Through processes of 'informal governance' PLA cadres are likely to retain links with the Maoist party. This may cause distortions in recruitment and promotion processes. This process can be observed in all aspects of government activity. With regard to the police, for example, there has been a history of alignment with the Nepali Congress and recruitment has been biased towards their party cadres. A recent PEA focused on Policing and Public Safety notes that the legal and institutional framework for policing, exacerbated by the uncertainties of the unstable coalition government, leaves police vulnerable to direct political interference at all levels.<sup>16</sup> ICG concludes that, '*The involvement of mainstream parties, police and administration officials in profiting from violence and offering protection is becoming institutionalised.*'<sup>17</sup> Processes of 'informal governance' operating within the security services pose a threat both in terms of local violence and in terms of the eventual management of elections. With political threads running through all national institutions it is unlikely that elections can be entirely free and fair.

Although none of the major actors has an interest in returning to war, the incidence of violence is high and probably rising especially in the *terai* (plains adjacent to India) where the Madhesi Movement led to the expulsion of people originating from the hills (Pahades) and then splintered into smaller groups which descended from local political demands into criminal activity.<sup>18</sup> Gangs and hired thugs are available to support or oppose local interests.

<sup>15</sup> The United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) or UCPN-M. For simplicity we refer to this party as 'the Maoists'

<sup>16</sup> Jones, S (2010) p12

<sup>17</sup> ICG (2010) pi

<sup>18</sup> ICG (2010) p13

This has led to increased violence associated with political activity and also with any government activity that offers opportunities for patronage and corruption.<sup>19</sup> With no elections in the last decade for Village Development Committees (VDCs) and District Development Committees (DDCs) much of this violence has been directed towards elections and resources focused around schools.

## 1.2 Political Factors

The recent PEA studies give prime importance to the issue of centralised control. The roots of this phenomenon go back to the history of the monarchy and the assertion of central rule over disparate elements initially by conquest and later reinforced through total concentration of power at the political centre. The Maoists, having emerged as the strongest single political party, have shown a strong interest in centralizing power. As ICG observes, *'They believe in authority and occasionally indulged their authoritarian streak once in government, stressing the need for order and discipline.... The Maoists want to control the state: they do not want it to wither away.'*<sup>20</sup> Although the Maoists have engaged in multi-party democracy their long-term strategy appears to be to create a single party state in which they would dominate.

Centralizing tendencies are particularly strong within the political parties and there is little sympathy with notions of transparency and downward accountability prevalent among aid agencies and civil society. Political parties support the concept of strong central government although their ruthless rivalries ensure that the result is the opposite. Lack of democratic process and transparency within political parties allows patronage and rent-seeking behaviour to spread.<sup>21</sup> Despite legislation intended to prevent it, political leaders maintain tight control over party finances and maintain their position through strong central control over the selection of candidates for election (when the time comes). Party cadres are highly dependent on a patron: ideological debate is not encouraged.

Because no party is able to create a government alone, recent years have been characterised by bargaining between the parties, especially for control of Ministries in which jobs can be found for party cadres or funds raised through sale of contracts. This hassled to a process in which the parties collude in dividing up the political spoils but because of uncertainty about whether they can hold their positions for long the looting of the state becomes more frenetic.<sup>22</sup> This happens at different levels. In the education sector, parties have come together at District level and decided which party can take the benefits in which school. As ICG notes, School Management Committees (SMCs) have become *'ways to retain loyal cadres and provide secondary opportunities for corruption and patronage.'*<sup>23</sup>

Uncertainty about the future also encourages politicians to make short-term promises and pledges that they know they will be unable to fulfil but which challenge other political leaders. The result is an abstract world of promises and policies that bears little resemblance to

<sup>19</sup> See ICG (2010) p19

<sup>20</sup> ICG (2010) p8

<sup>21</sup> Transparency International (2010)

<sup>22</sup> ICG (2010) p2, p5, p19

<sup>23</sup> ICG (2010) p20

reality. In the case of education, examples include ever-extending political promises of scholarships and free education.

In such a situation it is easy for one party to blame another for any shortcomings when in fact they are colluding in the general arrangement. Thus there is a strong tendency to talk principle and act out individual interests. The Maoists have developed a further excuse for any shortcomings which is to make a distinction between long-term strategic objectives (often very radical) and short-term tactical actions which may be almost the opposite. This enables the Maoist leaders to exploit short-term gains while telling its supporters that they still plan to deliver on their fundamental purposes and promises.

Processes of 'informal governance' have spread to the point that, according to the ICG, the state does not exist to deliver public services but for the informal distribution of state resources through political patronage networks: the *raison d'être* of the state, ICG says, '*is not serving citizens so much as servicing the needs of patronage networks and keeping budgets flowing and corruption going. The state is dysfunctional by demand. It is slow to reform because elite incentives are invested in the status quo and public pressure is rarely acute.*'

These negative political processes have penetrated deep into the civil service. Civil servants may be compelled to be politically aligned and are dependent on political patronage both for their formal advancement and in order to pursue corrupt practices with impunity. There is a danger that proposals from DPs may be viewed mainly from the perspective of job security, likelihood of transfers and opportunities for gain.<sup>24</sup> Processes of consultation may be an unreliable guide to policy-making. Because civil servants are unlikely to make use of public services but generally rely on private services, they may not take a personal interest in issues relating to public services.

The most important development since the peace agreement in 2006 has been the emergence of regionally-based political parties concerned with the issue of federalism. The unification of Madhesi<sup>25</sup> parties into the United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF) appeared to create a serious challenge to centralization but Madhesi leaders have subsequently aligned themselves with national parties and, in some cases, traded their federalist objectives for a seat in government.<sup>26</sup> The threat of dividing the state is used mainly as a bargaining position. Although regional politics could create greater political fluidity, it seems likely that it will add to the problem of weak government.

Although civil society represents a counterweight to some of these negative political tendencies, NGOs suffer from many of the same weaknesses including politicisation and centralisation. A key exception is the success of Forest Users Groups. This shows that communities can mobilise around local management of resources but the situation is very different in relation to local involvement in education.

<sup>24</sup> Generally the objective is to remain in Kathmandu or at least in a major town. Transfers to remote areas denote punishment.

<sup>25</sup> Broadly this term refers to people of the plains who are outside the dominant 'Pahadi' group

<sup>26</sup> Maklian (2008), ICG (2010).



### 1.3 Economic Factors

Since the end of the war in 2006, DPs have moved towards greater support through government institutions following the Paris Declaration Principle of Alignment but the dominance of ‘informal governance’ means that the effects can be distorted and reduced. Lack of monitoring of these unintended effects by DPs may have exacerbated the trends and allowed aid to become a major source of patronage and its associated processes of corruption.

Not only is Nepal a country dependent on aid, but officials have also become dependent on the opportunities that arise through aid budgets. Work attached to aid budgets may offer different terms and conditions from government service and also opportunities for patronage through contracts.<sup>27</sup> These factors often lead to compliance with donor agendas and requests without rigorous analysis.

Aid also tends to reinforce centralization and in particular increases the disparity between Kathmandu and the rest of the country. Large amounts of aid are directed to capacity building exercises in the capital but the effects are rarely seen in the field.

Economic development is constrained by the workings of ‘informal governance’ and lack of open competition. A recent PEA study of the power sector, for example, found that *‘progress is dependent on the achievement of a greater degree of political stability and the establishment of a government that is able to pursue coherent policies and institutional reforms, and in particular to find a way of isolating priority areas of policy making from domination by short-term considerations of rent-seeking and political advantage’*.<sup>28</sup>

Despite all these negative factors, the incidence of poverty has been falling in all groups over a number of years.<sup>29</sup> This is attributed largely to remittances from migrant workers. About half of rural households benefit from such remittances and in many cases the benefits extend beyond basic consumption towards luxury expenditure, notably for private education. Investment in productive activity is not much in evidence reflecting the poor business climate especially for small businesses without political patronage. Wealthy local leaders do not send their children to government schools and may invest in setting up private schools, creating further incentives to ignore or even undermine state services.

### 1.4 Social Factors

DPs have been particularly concerned about social inclusion in Nepal in relation to dalits<sup>30</sup>, women and girls.<sup>31</sup> A factor driving this concern is the evidence that these groups in particular have been drawn into conflict and violence as supporters of the Maoists. DPs have developed indices and monitoring systems for social inclusion and encouraged special programmes. An extensive recent study by Tufts University<sup>32</sup> indicates that there has been a

<sup>27</sup> See Shukya, S (2009) pp94-107

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. The same view is put forward by Shukya, S (2009)

<sup>29</sup> The recent National Living Standard Survey (NLSS) detected a dramatic decrease in poverty from 41% to 13% over 8 years.

<sup>30</sup> Hindus outside the caste system – former ‘untouchables’

<sup>31</sup> There are many forms of inclusion/exclusion. For a summary see Jones, S (2010) p3 and for a full analysis Bennett, L (2005)

<sup>32</sup> Sharma, R J and A Donini (2010) *Towards a Great Transformation..* Tufts University

significant improvement in relation to social inclusion especially in the school enrolment of dalits and girls. During the present study, respondents confirmed that in the hilly areas direct discrimination against dalits was now unusual although dalit participation in religious practices remained contentious. Dalits in Silgadi (Doti District) had faced violence from upper castes when they sought to enter the temple, but with support from the police they were able to do so in a large group. It was still considered risky for small groups of dalits to enter the temple. In some areas of the rural *terai* caste-based discrimination is still prevalent although less so following the reduction of Pahade influence because of the Madhesi Movement.

Although there has been a marked increase in enrolment of girls in government schools, parents prefer to invest in boys when it comes to paying for private education. A further problem is that girls enrolled into government schools have higher drop-out rates than boys reflecting ongoing deficiencies such as lack of women teachers and continued demands from parents to attend to work in the house and fields. DP policies and NGOs have played a significant role in these social changes but mobilisation by the Maoists may have played a greater role. The spread of education, despite its many limitations, has also played a significant role. According to the Tufts University study- *'Education was perhaps seen as the most important factor in bringing about transformation in Nepali society. People again and again emphasized the role of education in making them 'aware' and building up their confidence.'*<sup>33</sup>

### 1.5. Implications for Education

Geopolitical factors and persistent historical trends are likely to lock Nepal into a state of weak governance and this hassled to the prevalence of short-term rent-seeking behaviours characterised in this report as 'informal governance'. The problem is that institutional interests now favour the dominance of 'informal' over 'formal' governance. In general aid inputs tend to exacerbate the problems rather than provide solutions. Individual aid officials need have no fear of doing themselves out of a job. As ICG concludes, *'large sections of Nepal's economy and political system rest on the solid foundation of state non-delivery and would be greatly disturbed by a dramatic improvement in efficiency.'*<sup>34</sup>

This phenomenon has devastating consequences for public education. Because teachers are extremely important to the political parties as local cadres and potential organisers of elections they are willing to concede the right for teachers to dispense with controls from the formal institutions of government and ignore Head Teachers and SMCs. Similarly, Head Teachers, SMC Chairs and education officials may conspire at District level to abuse educational assets and funds. These activities are negotiated with and condoned by political parties. Weak structures of formal government in the justice sector allow this to continue with impunity.

Cheating in exams is an opportunity for local bribery and corruption but its institutional form has come to serve the wider interest of educational institutions. The political parties may become involved in dividing up the passes between them according to an agreed formula.<sup>35</sup> Schools credited with higher pass rates attract added funding and education officials can use such success as reasons for further funding by DPs. Collusion in allowing girls to register in

<sup>33</sup> Op cit p21

<sup>34</sup> ICG (2010) p43

<sup>35</sup> ICG (2010) p5

several schools, false registers and even 'ghost schools' provide opportunities for income through scholarships and grants. The actions of individuals in these processes of 'informal governance' are not simply focused on personal gain but may reflect forces on them that they cannot resist, social norms and ideological commitments to specific political approaches. Much idealism is still invested in Maoist perspectives of a more equal society and conservative determination to prevent the Maoists from seizing unilateral power. Nepal should not be viewed as a corrupt society but simply as one in which there is an intense dichotomy between 'formal governance' and 'informal governance'. On an individual basis this amounts to little more than a tendency to sort things out on a personal basis rather than through the abstractions of law and what many regard as external norms.

In the current education system, students are conditioned to 'informal governance' and its implied focus on personal advance and disregard for society as a whole. The problem is that such a system tends to favour the rich and powerful, and can lead to increasing class divisions which, as has been shown in the past, can be mobilised by elite groups to bring about violent conflict.

## Section Two: Sector-Level Analysis (Education)

### 2.1 The Education Sector: Historical Legacy

Nepal's modern education system has a history of just over six decades. The end of the Rana oligarchy in 1951 and the beginning of an egalitarian political system created an opportunity to introduce universal access to education. A Board of Education was established in 1952 to initiate educational development in Nepal and the National Education Planning Commission (NEPC), with financial and advisory support from the United States, was tasked to study then existing educational initiatives and propose a homogenous national education system that would promote unity, democratic values and national pride.

The first *Five Year Plan for Education in Nepal* (1956 – 1961) emphasised 'national' characteristics in the education system by adopting a national curriculum for primary level; compulsory teaching of the Nepali language in all schools, and categorically barring the teaching and learning of other indigenous languages in the schools. The NEPC report recommended that Nepal's education be geared towards restoring historically ignored 'essential characteristics' – 'national pride, virility and individuality'.<sup>36</sup>

The royal coup of 1960 and the establishment of the Panchayat system added a new theme of *rajbhakti* (service to monarchy)<sup>37</sup> and placed an even greater emphasis on national unity and solidarity. The New Education System Plan (NESP) was announced in 1971 with an aim to meet the social, political and economic needs of the nation and again to solidify the project of nation building through the educational process. The main objective of the NESP was to make citizens loyal to the Crown and the Panchayat political system as well as develop scientific and technical human resources.<sup>38</sup> All schools were nationalised under the Ministry of Education and a national curriculum was made compulsory to enforce Panchayati values through teaching and learning across the country. The US and other donors viewed this plan as a 'ploy' by the palace to legitimise royal supremacy and solidify the Panchayat system. As a result, the education sector lost substantial international funding.

The expansion of education during this period was said to be a 'psychological adornment' rather than a national strategy to produce citizens capable of contributing to the economic development of the nation.<sup>39</sup> Hence, the education system was developed as a tool for nationalising the diverse Nepali society, favourably disposed to the monarchy and the ruling elite (mainly representing hill high castes)<sup>40</sup> who were in control of the state apparatus. Even though two major political changes have occurred since, the legacy of the Panchayat education system still prevails.

The Nepalese school system has two types of schools: community schools (supported by government, but may be aided or unaided financially by government), and institutional schools (supported by parents and trustees and privately managed). Community schools

<sup>36</sup> See Pandey et al. (1956, p.74)

<sup>37</sup> See Onta (1996) for an analysis of making of the national history in Nepal

<sup>38</sup> See HMG (1971) National Education System Plan for 1971-76

<sup>39</sup> Ragsdale (1989, p.15)

<sup>40</sup> Lawoti (2007)

have three sub-categories: community-aided (fully supported financially and managed by the government), community-managed (supported and funded by the government fully but managed by the community) and community-unaided (getting either partial or no funding from the government). In addition, there are 766 religious schools (Madarasa, Gumba/Vihar and Ashram/Gurukul)<sup>41</sup> that receive support including funding and curriculum materials from the government once they are recognised by the Department of Education.

The SSRP introduces changes to the overall structure of schooling and the extension of basic (compulsory) education by two years

**Table: Planned changes in Education Structure**

Age	Grade	Types of Schooling System		
		Old System	New System (SSRP)	
16	12	Higher Secondary Education (Grades 11-12)	Secondary Education (Grades 9-12)	
15	11			
14	10	Secondary Education (Grades 9-10)		
13	9			
12	8	Lower Secondary Education (Grades 6-8)	Basic Education (Grades 1-8)	
11	7			
10	6			
9	5	Primary Education (Grades 1-5)		
8	4			
7	3			
6	2			
5	1			
4	Pre-Primary Education/			
3	Early Childhood Development			

## 2.2 Schools during the armed conflict

Some notable improvements in the education sector had taken place by the 1990s, for example, a dramatic increase in the number of schools, increased net enrolment rate and more equitable access to education across socioeconomic groups. However, in reality

<sup>41</sup> DoE (2010b)

education and economic development were disconnected. Long-standing discontents and the increasing disappointment with elected governments provided a basis for the Maoists (then CPN-M) to declare the 'People's War' in 1996.

Involvement of teachers and students in political movements is not a new phenomenon in Nepal, but the emergence and expansion of the Maoist rebellion engaged both teachers and young people in the Maoist movement in different ways. School premises provided shelters for the rebels, young recruits (students) for their militia<sup>42</sup> and a large group of educated people (teachers) who believed that the 'People's War' was the only way of bringing about social and economic change in Nepal.<sup>43</sup>

Schoolteachers and young students were often caught in the middle of conflict between the security forces and the Maoist rebels. By 2004, an estimated 3,000 teachers had been displaced from schools in the rural areas, directly impacting on an estimated 100,000 students' education.<sup>44</sup> A significant number of displaced teachers still cite security reasons for their inability to return to their designated schools. A large number of school children as well as teachers were kidnapped to attend Maoist political training programmes or mass gatherings and a significant number were forced to join the war.

It was reported that more than 79 schools, one university and 13 district education offices were destroyed by the Maoists between January 2002 and December 2006, of which 32 involved bomb explosions and at least 3 schools were caught in crossfire between the rebels and security forces.<sup>45</sup> Schools were targeted by security personnel who arrested, tortured and even killed teachers and school children suspected of being Maoist activists or sympathizers.<sup>46</sup> A total of 145 teachers were killed by the warring parties during the conflict.<sup>47</sup>

## 2.3 Current Structural Issues

### 2.3.1 Education reproduces caste-based disparities

Despite the significant expansion of education during the last few decades, ethnic and caste-based disparities persist in access and attainment. By 2001 the literacy rate among Brahmins (the so-called upper caste) was 70 percent compared with 10 percent among the several low-status caste groups that constituted 9 percent of the country's population.<sup>48</sup> Socio-economic status is strongly correlated with access to private education: 44 percent of students from the richest quintiles are enrolled in private schools as compared to 7 percent from the three poorest quintiles.<sup>49</sup> Those who have access to English medium education in private schools are more likely to succeed in the modern job markets such as the business sector and non-governmental organisations. The wealthiest quintile benefits from the social

<sup>42</sup> Watchlist (2005)

<sup>43</sup> Pherali (2011)

<sup>44</sup> Thapa and Sijapati 2004

<sup>45</sup> INSEC (2007)

<sup>46</sup> Amnesty International, 2005; Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre, 2006; Dhital, 2006

<sup>47</sup> INSEC (2007)

<sup>48</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics (2003)

<sup>49</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, (2004)

and political networks of the privileged, and is likely to gain easier access to economic opportunities. This kind of social reproduction is difficult to break through project-based interventions and perpetuates the caste-based social order in Nepali society.

Even within government schools there is evidence that poorer students are disadvantaged. Children from poorer families are much more likely to be absent from school because their labour is required for work in the fields or at home. Cultural factors may interact with these demands. Dalit children are considered much more likely to be absent than other children while there is strong pressure on children from Bahun-Chhetri families to continue their studies.<sup>50</sup>

### **2.3.2 Education is poorly aligned with the economy**

Even though education is valued, it is not necessarily perceived as a tool for guaranteeing a secure economic future for the majority of rural people. Employment opportunities are scarce and nepotism and favouritism are rampant. Almost one third of the Nepalese youth population is currently employed in unskilled jobs in the Gulf States, Malaysia and Korea and approximately 400,000 Nepalese go abroad in search of employment or better life prospects every year.<sup>51</sup> This has resulted in weak and precarious economic growth, dependent on foreign employment, and not backed by proper economic structures within the country.

The impact of remittances has so far been mainly felt in a desire for private education as a mark of social status but in some areas remittances have led to a boom in construction and this could provide the basis for greater demand for skilled workers. The education system remains very weak in relation to vocational skills. Some educationalists argue that vocational training options should be introduced from Grade 8 and that after passing the SLC exam students should have access to vocational training in 11 and 12 Grades. Currently these Grades are almost entirely focused on training in education for prospective teachers who are unlikely to find jobs. There is a need for an informed national debate about the function of education and in particular the place of vocational training in the system. DPs could usefully promote such a debate by conducting research and engaging with civil society.

### **2.3.3 Significant improvements in enrolment and equity**

There has been significant progress in access to and equity in education over the last 60 years. The literacy rate among the adult population (15 years +) has increased to 57.9% and 80.8% of the youth population are literate.<sup>52</sup> From the situation in 1951 when there were 8,505 students in 321 primary schools and 1,680 students in 11 secondary schools, currently there are 4,951,956 students studying in 32,648 primary and 1,130,336 students in 7,559 secondary schools across the country. In the last 60 years the numbers of primary and secondary schools have increased approximately by 102 and 661 times respectively. The primary Net Enrolment Rate has increased significantly reaching 93.7 percent in 2009 although the rate remains much lower in secondary schools.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Teachers Union of Nepal (2010) p26

<sup>51</sup> The Himalayan Times (2010)

<sup>52</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2008)

<sup>53</sup> DoE (2010a)

Gender-based disparity in terms of access to education has almost ended with an average of 50 percent girls enrolment at all levels.<sup>54</sup> There is still a large gender disparity in the teaching workforce, of which less than 24 percent are female teachers. A significant improvement in *dalit* and *janajati* (indigenous peoples) participation in education has been achieved with an average of 15 percent *dalits* against their total population of 12 percent and 40 percent *janajatis* against their total population of 40 percent. The following table presents a summary of key educational statistics but, as we will show in Section Three, there are huge variations between schools and areas:

### Box: Key Educational Statistics

1. The average Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in ECD/ PPCs is 70% with 69.2 for girls and 70.9 for boys. (SSR target: 72%)
2. The proportion of students in grade 1 with ECD/PPC experience is 52.1%, with 52.4% girls and 51.9% boys. (SSR target: 45%)
3. Out of the total 33,160 schools 32,684 are primary, 11,939 are lower secondary, 32,685 basic, 7,266 are secondary, 2,564 higher secondary and 7,559 secondary (grade 9-12) level.
4. On average, the school student ratios are 1:152 at primary, 1:142 at lower secondary, 1:202 at basic (grade 1-8), 1:112 at secondary, 1:124 at higher secondary and 1:150 at secondary (grade 9-12) levels.
5. The total number of students at primary, level is 4,951,956; at lower secondary the total is 1,699,927; this makes a combined total of 6,651,883 in 'basic' education (Grades 1-8); institutional/private schools serve around 12% of children in basic education.
6. Of the total enrolment at school, girls' enrolment constitutes 50% at all levels;
7. In comparison to their share in the total population at around 12%, the share of Dalit enrolment is 21.5% at primary level, 14.2% at lower secondary, 10.0% at secondary and 6.3% at higher secondary level.
8. In comparison to their share in the total population at around 40%, the share of Janajati enrolment is 38.2% at primary level, 41.8% at lower secondary, 40.8% at secondary and 31.0% at higher secondary level.
9. The promotion and repetition rates in grade 1 are 69.1% and 22.6%. The promotion rates in the upper grades are better as compared to the grade 1. The repetition rate in grade 8 is 6.6%. (SSR target: 7%)
10. The overall survival rate to grade eight is 66.0%, with 65.2% for boys and 67.2% for girls. (SSR target: 49%)
11. The proportion of female teachers by level in all types of schools is: 42.2% at primary level, 25.9% at lower secondary level and 17.3% at secondary level.
12. The proportion of Dalit teachers at primary, lower secondary and secondary levels are: 4.4%, 2.6%, 2.7% respectively.
13. The proportion of Janajati teachers at primary, lower secondary and secondary levels are: 29.8%, 17.2% and 12.7 respectively.
14. The percentage of fully-trained teachers in all types of schools is 80.7% at primary level, 63.6% at lower secondary level and 85.1 at secondary level respectively.
15. The student-teacher ratios (based on the approved positions of the teachers) in community schools are 43:1 at primary, 57:1 at lower secondary and 35:1 at secondary level respectively.
16. The number of students using a local language in the teaching and learning process as a transitional language at primary level is 17,273.

Source: *Educational Statistics of Nepal*<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> DoE (2010b)

<sup>55</sup> DoE (2010b)



### 2.3.4 Quality of education remains low, whilst repetition and dropout rates are high

Even though the primary Net Enrolment Rate has increased, 22.6 percent of these children fail to make satisfactory progress resulting in repetition in Grade 1 compared with an SSRP target of 8 percent repetition at primary level. More than one-third of children (34 percent) drop out by the time they reach Grade 8.

A 24 percent pass rate in the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination in 1991 has now reached 68.67 percent in the year 2010. While this exceeds the SSRP target of 64 percent, the overall quality of education is debatable. SLC results can be questioned due to poorly managed exams and irregularities such as cheating, guidance by teachers in the exam halls and copying.<sup>56</sup> Even without such distortions it is questionable whether the exam results provide a good guide to the quality of education. An emphasis on rote-learning may discourage broader forms of development while also, as noted above, the education system is blamed for not serving the labour market.

### 2.3.5 Reliability of educational statistics

There is a serious issue with the reliability of educational statistics. It is difficult to obtain accurate data on teacher absenteeism because Head Teachers sign the registers for them even if they are absent and understate the problem when questioned.<sup>57</sup> It is only by direct observation that more accurate assessments can be made.

The Net Enrolment Rate reported by the DoE does not necessarily reflect the realities in the field. There are political and economic motivations for over reporting school-based statistics. Per capita funding, scholarships and other grants are associated with the number of children enrolled in the school, creating a clear economic advantage for reporting an increased student enrolment. In Dhanusha, it was found that out of a reported enrolment of 510, only 205 children were present on a typical school day. One head teacher reported that the DEO provides much less funding than the number of children reported. This is because the DEO is aware of the practice of over reporting, so schools respond by over reporting even more. Additionally, DPs and other international agencies are keen to see educational improvement in statistical terms which the government experiences as a pressure to demonstrate improved enrolments and higher achievement. Such pressures create disincentives to scrutinise the reliability of data too closely at local, national and international levels which means that the process of educational development driven by international development goals may have produced unintended outcomes in relation to the reporting of data.

### 2.3.6 Ethnic and indigenous groups

While Nepali is still the official language, the Constitution of Nepal 1990 restored the right to have primary education in the 'mother tongue'. The government Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) has developed textbooks in various local languages including Maithili, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Tamang, Limbu, Bantawa Rai, Chamling Rai, Sherpa, Gurung, Magar and Nepal Bhasha. However, there has been a lack of meaningful engagement with local communities in the design and development of mother tongue materials and more importantly, the limited capacity of the existing workforce to teach in local languages has not

<sup>56</sup> This theme emerged during fieldwork in schools in Doti, Rolpa, Kapilvastu, Udaypur and Sankhuwasabha.

<sup>57</sup> Teachers' Union of Nepal (2010) p30

been fully recognised. This suggests that the process is a top-down intervention without adequate preparation on the ground.<sup>58</sup>

The Maoist forty-point agenda includes a demand that- *'all languages and dialects should be given equal opportunities to prosper. The right to education in the mother tongue up to higher levels should be guaranteed'*.<sup>59</sup> This demand helped to expand the Maoist power base among the ethnic minorities, *dalits* and indigenous populations. The majority of Maoist activists and *People's Liberation Army* cadres are young people from these groups.<sup>60</sup>

The twenty-one day long Madhesi movement in January 2007 gave added impetus to issues relating to ethnic identity, indigenous culture and local languages. There is a possibility that federal states may be defined largely in these terms with profound implications for education. In addition, such states may demand that education should be removed from central control.

### 2.3.7 Private versus government schools

Even though the majority of Nepalese children use public rather than private education, significant and increasing numbers are turning to private schools. Private schools in Nepal do not receive government funding, nor are their teachers trained or monitored by any state mechanism. These schools charge fees to parents and offer the curriculum in the English medium. Private schools generally perform significantly better than government funded schools in the SCL examination. Taking into account variations in different years the pass rate for those sitting SLC exams from private schools is double that of students from government schools.

The general perception that all private schools in Nepal have a sound financial situation is debatable. A large number of private schools outside the Kathmandu valley struggle to survive, teachers prefer to work in the capital and more importantly, affordability of private education in smaller towns and rural areas is questionable. However, there is a widespread perception that private schools exploit their teachers by ignoring government regulations. Even though the government regulation requires independent schools to spend a minimum of 60 percent of their total income on teachers' salaries. A recent evaluation conducted by the Department of Education shows that teachers in some private schools are paid up to 75 percent less than the basic salary fixed by the government.<sup>61</sup>

The majority of teachers in private schools are not formally trained so this also raises questions about how the quality of teaching differs government schools. The SLC exam, which is the key indicator of government versus private school success, largely assesses students' ability to memorise or reproduce answers during examinations. Students mainly focus on examination preparation rather than engaging in a meaningful learning process. This is re-emphasised by a growing business in selling examination papers, model questions and readymade answers that are easily available at bookstores so, even if students secure good results, this might not necessarily reflect the quality of learning.

<sup>58</sup> Shields and Rappleye, (2008, p.269)

<sup>59</sup> Maoist Statements and Documents (2003)

<sup>60</sup> Lawoti (2005)

<sup>61</sup> Nayapatrika, 06 February 2011

The Maoists were among those to argue that the spread of private education is a consequence of the underperforming government education system.<sup>62</sup> During the armed conflict, the Maoists were critical of commercialisation of education and demanded the abolition of the private education system but their position appears to have moderated today.

## 2.4 Institutional factors

Despite the expansion and growing sophistication of teacher training there is considerable concern about transferability of these skills into classroom practice.<sup>63</sup> Due to the lack of a proper classroom monitoring system, it is difficult to establish how teaching practices have improved, but it is generally accepted that no substantial change has occurred in the pedagogical culture of most schools. This suggests that policy level interventions alone do not achieve positive outcomes and points back towards factors such as the undermining of school management by politicized unions as fundamental obstacles to change.

The Curriculum Development Centre has revised curricula at basic education level by incorporating local content as well as topics on Peace-building, Human Rights and Civic education.<sup>64</sup> However, teachers have not been trained properly to deal with these sensitive issues. There is also a growing concern about effective implementation of education policies. A report published by the National Centre for Educational Development reveals that around 60 percent of teacher development policies were unimplemented or partially implemented. However, 'resource-tied policies, provisions under training curriculum and legally obligatory policies were found implemented in the majority cases'.<sup>65</sup> In other words the system complies with the most basic formal requirements but is not responsive to issues that would support education quality in the wider sense.

The nature of the education system under a new Constitution are yet to be identified but federalism is likely to be a key factor especially if the responsibility for education is given to federal states. Although issues of ethnic identity and education in the 'mother tongue' are being advanced by politicians, the financial implications of such changes have yet to be analyzed and it is clear that the debates are likely to continue for a long time to come.

## 2.5 The School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP)

The School Sector Reform Plan 2009-15 (SSRP) was introduced in 2009 as a key policy of the Ministry of Education and designed with the active involvement of Nepal's development partners. It was developed as a continuation of on-going programmes notably Education for All (EFA). The SSRP seeks to restructure the education system, improve quality and institutionalise performance accountability'.<sup>66</sup> The plan integrates 'key policy goals and values, including the right to education, gender parity inclusion and equity'.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> DoE (2010b)

<sup>63</sup> DoE (2010b)

<sup>64</sup> NCED has produced a teacher-training manual and has reported trained 144 master trainers who are expected to train more trainers in the future. These trainers will then train over 200,000 teachers in basic education level.

<sup>65</sup> NCED (2063 B.S.)

<sup>66</sup> SSRP, p.1

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

The cost of the SSRP over the first five years is estimated to be \$2.626 billion. The Government of Nepal has committed \$2.002 billion and development partners have pledged \$0.5 billion. ‘The Government expects that the funding gap can be closed by employing a resource mobilisation strategy, targeting non-pooling development partners, I/NGOs and the Catalytic Fund from the Fast Track Initiative (FTI)’.

A large portion of the annual education budget (67 percent in 2009-2010) was allocated for basic education (1 – 8) whereas 18 percent was allocated for secondary education.<sup>68</sup> The Status Report 2010-011 shows good progress towards achieving its targets by 2015-16. The Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) sector has spread rapidly. However, the Report cites issues around availability of learning materials, sufficient budget and effective strategies to retain (the low-paid) ECED facilitators.

The SSRP has set baseline indicators for monitoring purposes. The following table provides a summary of the indicators:

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<sup>68</sup> DoE (2010a)

Indicators	Unit	Base Years		Targets						
		2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
1. Share of Education Budget in										
GNP	%	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.5
GDP	%	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.9	4.0
2. Share in Education Budget										
Basic Education	%	70	71	71	72	73	74	74	75	76
Secondary Education	%	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
3. Enrolment at Grade 1										
New entrants with ECED experience	%	33	36	41	45	51	57	64	71	80
Gross Intake Rate	%	141	148	144	140	137	133	130	127	123
Net Intake Rate	%	78	81	83	86	88	91	94	97	100
4. Gross Enrolment Rate										
ECED/Pre primary	%	60	63	67	72	77	82	87	93	99
Basic Education (1-8)	%	116	123	125	128	130	132	132	131	131
Secondary Education	%	36	40	43	47	52	58	66	75	83
5. Net Enrolment Rate										
Primary Education	%	89	92	94	96	97	98	99	99	100
Basic Education	%	71	73	75	77	80	82	85	87	90
Secondary Education	%	20	21	22	23	24	26	27	29	31
6. Teachers with required qualification and training										
Basic Education	%	62	66	70	74	79	83	88	94	100
Secondary Education	%	74	77	80	83	86	89	93	96	100
7. Teachers with required Certification										
Basic Education	%	90	91	92	94	95	96	97	99	100
Secondary Education	%	90	91	92	94	95	96	97	99	100
8. Pupil Teacher Ratio										
Basic Education	Ratio	44	43	41	40	39	38	37	36	34
Secondary Education	Ratio	42	39	37	34	32	30	28	26	25
9. Repetition Rate										
Grade 1	%	28	18	12	8	5	3	2	1	1
Grade 8	%	13	11	9	7	6	5	4	3	2
10. Survival Rate by cohort method										
Grade 5	%	54	58	61	65	70	74	79	84	90
Grade 8	%	37	41	45	49	54	60	66	73	80
11. Coefficient of Efficiency										
Basic Education	Ratio	0.46	0.49	0.52	0.55	0.59	0.62	0.66	0.71	0.75
Secondary Education	Ratio	0.30	0.33	0.36	0.39	0.42	0.46	0.50	0.55	0.60
12. Learning Achievement										
Average Score of students in core subjects in grade 5 and 8										
Grade 5	%	50	53	56	60	63	67	71	75	80
Grade 8	%	44	46	48	49	51	54	56	58	60
13. Pass Rate										
Percentage of students passed in the SLC and HSE National Examination										
SLC	%	60	62	64	65	67	69	71	73	75
Higher Secondary	%	23	25	28	31	34	37	41	45	50
14. Literacy Rate										
Percentage of literate people										
Age Group 15-24	%	73	75	78	80	83	86	89	92	95
Age Group 6+ years	%	63	69	76	78	80	83	85	88	90
Age Group 15+ years	%	52	56	60	62	64	67	70	72	75
15. Literacy GPI (15+)										
	Ratio	0.61	0.74	0.90	0.92	0.93	0.95	0.96	0.98	1.00

Source: SSRP, p.2

Development partners and government officials strongly support the idea of decentralisation in education. Although the plan was not developed by the political parties, and has not been enacted in law, it is difficult for politicians to reject ideas such as free basic education, instruction in mother tongue, technical and vocational education to better equip young people with employment skills, empowering local communities to take ownership of the school, integrating local content in the curriculum to enhance relevance of their education and focus on quality education. The officials argue that the SSRP is a technical plan and therefore would fit in any kind of political structure that Nepal might adopt in the future-

*'The SSRP is not a revolution but continuity of previous educational programmes. It has three key themes: inclusion, restructuring and decentralisation. The provision of scholarship and other grants are aimed at enhancing educational opportunities for marginalised groups. The educational restructuring is intended to improve the quality of education and student retention as well as to secure funding for basic education (grades 1-8). Decentralisation has no alternative other than developing capacities of people to take extended roles in this process. However, it faces a number of risks including resistance from politicians who intend to control the system from the centre rather than devolving power to the local levels.'*

Senior Official, Ministry of Education

In practice the progress of the SSRP has been hindered by lack of underpinning legislation which has made many officials reluctant to push forward. In addition, contentious transitional politics and politicised teaching workforce have added further obstacles. As there is no elected government at local level, the initiative lacks a responsible local body for its implementation. Furthermore, the SSRP has not been effectively communicated to educational stakeholders at local level. Most head teachers and teachers in the rural areas are ignorant about the aims of the plan and see it as another government initiative that will be talked about until the DPs' funding runs out. They continue with what they have been doing and report to DEO as required.

The SSRP also aims to ensure that all school teachers possess the necessary knowledge and skills to facilitate teaching and learning effectively. Teacher training and professional development are not well integrated. The overemphasis on a 'delivery model' of teacher training is likely to ignore other critical aspects such as the sociopolitical context, critical appraisal of the content, motivation and trainee's willingness to transfer skills into practice, which are also important in enhancing the impact of training.<sup>69</sup> The real challenge to successful implementation of SSRP may lie in motivating the teaching workforce to transform their pedagogical practices, instructional supervision and monitoring of programmes at local level.

There has been a significant improvement in enhancing functional literacy among youth and adults. The situation of 30 percent adult literacy in 1990 increased to 46 percent in 2001 and Nepal is aiming to achieve 75 percent adult literacy by 2015. However, availability of learning materials and allocation of sufficient funding to support the adult literacy programme has generally become a hindrance in achieving this target.

## 2.6 Stakeholder Analysis

Teachers' unions oppose the transfer of school management to the community. They fear that their 'rights and status' will not be secure<sup>70</sup> and their position is reflected in the policies of the political parties. The Maoists formally oppose both transfer of schools to the community and the provision of private education.<sup>71</sup> SMCs have strong political characteristics and in many schools the SMC Chair and the head teacher may have conflicting political views, preventing any common understanding of school management issues. Local level party organizations have close links with school management

<sup>69</sup> NCED (2063 B.S.)

<sup>70</sup> Vaux and Smith (2006, p.25)

<sup>71</sup> Caddell (2007, p.15)

committees. There are also political pressures on DEOs relating to issues such as recruiting the relief quota teachers, distributing scholarships, school auditing and school upgrading. In many schools in the *terai* politics and crime often intersect and schools have not been able to form SMCs due to threats from armed groups.

The leadership and management capacity of head teachers was weakened significantly during the armed conflict. Maoist pressure for mandatory donations, compulsory attendance at their political programmes, intimidation and potential physical assaults left head teachers and teachers demoralised. During the emergency period, mutual trust amongst teachers eroded considerably.

Teachers rely heavily on textbooks. Lecture methods and rote-learning dominates. Opportunities for continuing professional development or the provision of ongoing support are virtually non-existent. Professional rewards for teachers are negligible. The chances of promotion in the teaching profession are poor but permanent positions are secure because of unionisation. This leaves teachers in a stagnant career. Teachers in villages often become involved in other activity such as local business and farming.

Many parents cannot afford to send their children to secondary education or higher education due to their poor economic conditions. While the scholarship programme is positive, the amount (RS.350 – 1000 per year) is not attractive when they need their children to support them at home. The consequences of this include continued marginalisation of many of the country's poor and disadvantaged groups.

Most school children are involved in community-based organizations such as children's clubs, youth clubs and cultural groups. These are supported by NGOs working in the community and they organize a wide range of capacity building activities. However, there is a lack of school-community partnership in these initiatives. Teaching and learning in the school could benefit substantially from partnerships with these organizations and vice versa. Some young students are organized under student unions affiliated to political parties.

## **2.7 Implications of the education sector analysis**

- There is no strategic vision for educational development based on a common understanding of Nepal's future and specific needs from the education sector. Current approaches deal with issues in a piecemeal fashion leaving issues such as the purpose of education unresolved. The political parties, even if they were capable of such vision, are mostly focusing on ongoing political uncertainties and building patronage networks that undermine rather than support education. The SSRP is essentially a technical plan designed collaboratively by bureaucrats and DPs. Officials are uncertain whether to implement key changes proposed by the SSRP in the absence of an appropriate Education Act.
- Political discourses, particularly on the issue of federalism and ethnic rights are likely to impact on the SSRP but the uncertain political future has made it difficult to plan for a multicultural and ethnically diverse state. Progress has been made in the curriculum and textbooks but not in relation to education structures.

- The education sector has made significant progress over the past two decades especially in terms of spread and quantity. But there is considerable doubt about the quality of education and its function in social change.
- There is an increasing divide between private and state education, yet there seems to be little reference to the implications of this in the SSRP and little account taken of how the education reforms will play out across these different school environments.
- School culture is heavily influenced by politics, and political interests often override the teaching and learning processes. The strong relationship of teacher unions and political parties has undermined effective management of teachers.
- The transferability of pedagogical knowledge and skills into practice is a critical issue in teacher development.
- More sustainable interventions are necessary to bring about change in education. Increased participation of teachers, local communities and other stakeholders is vital in identifying problems and in designing and implementing effective programmes. Programmes originated in the centre are less likely to succeed.
- While several NGOs conduct educational programmes around and within schools, there is a lack of working partnership between government agencies and NGOs working in the education sector.

The political economy relationships between structures, institutions and actors are complex. Poverty and lack of economic opportunities act as dominant drivers whilst the motivations of individual actors are also heavily influenced by transitional politics. Excessive politicisation of educational institutions has seriously damaged professional integrity thereby increasing educational actors' dependency on political patronage. The following is an attempt to represent the relationships between various stakeholders within the education system-



**Political Economy Network of School System in Nepal**

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## Section Three: Problem-Level Analysis

### Introduction

The preceding sections have focused on structural factors at the macro and education sector levels. Section Three analyses problems relating to education policies and focuses on the perceptions and influence of individual actors, notably DEOs, Head-teachers, SMC Chairs, parents and children. It draws on the field visits, focus groups and interviews.

### 3.1 General Structural Constraints

The field studies provide extensive evidence of the structural problems identified in Section One. As an example of the collusion of political parties in 'dividing up the spoils', in Doti they have created an 'association' of teacher unions to negotiate education issues collectively. The representative of the association sits in the District Education Office. This is not an attempt to keep politics out of education or reduce political influences but instead allows the parties to decide on their own solutions and present them to the DEO for implementation. The arrangement allows the parties to manage the appointment of teachers and allocation of funding in their own interests. By using their links with the central political party (and the collusion among parties associated with weak government) local politicians disempower DEOs and other officials. By protecting teachers they also disempower Head Teachers and SMCs. Agreement among the parties appears to work quite smoothly in Doti -from the parties' perspective but to the detriment of education. But the struggle for resources is much more intensive in the *terai* where cooperation gives way to open violence and intimidation in many cases. This reflects a general characteristic that while the structural forces identified in Section One operate in all areas, they operate at different strength in different areas. 'Informal governance' is weakest in the mountain and hill areas and strongest in the *terai* where it is backed by violence and threats of violence.

Local preferences can also make a difference. People and parties in the District have shown an exceptionally strong interest in educational expansion, extending primary schools to 'basic' schools and especially formation of Higher Secondary schools (Grades 11 and 12). Substantial funding has been made available for education through the District Development Committees (DDCs) and Village Development Committees (VDCs). In fact the Committees have gone beyond the full amount permitted for education and transferred funds from other budgets (notably road-building) into education. This funding is used not only for capital expenditure but also for recurrent costs including local recruitment of additional teachers. Although difficult to prove there were reports that the allocation of these funds was done on a basis of 'proportional representation' between the parties (i.e. a balance of SMC Chairpersons, contractors etc favoured by different parties).

In Rolpa the local drivers were different. Very limited funding was directed towards education and the focus was on road-building. This difference must arise from the very different historical background of the two Districts. Rolpa has been highly neglected in respect of basic infrastructure while Doti has a long tradition of education dating back to early efforts under the monarchy. Ethnic and cultural factors may also be a cause of this variation. The

predominantly Magar population of Rolpa has shown less inclination to education than the heterodox and upper caste population of Doti. A comparison of the two Districts suggests that multiple factors affect educational preferences and that, despite the filter created by political parties and absence of democratic structures, local preferences can affect outcomes.

Strong variation between adjacent schools in the same District also suggests that human agency plays an important role in educational outcomes. In all areas, including the *terai*, it was possible to find schools that were functioning well in spite of the obstacles. Next to these might be schools that were otherwise identical but failing badly. Despite the structural constraints described in Section One, SMC Chairs and Head-teachers do seem to make a difference. The disturbing feature is that success takes place against the odds.

### 3.2 Education Policy in Practice

An earlier review of EFA in Nepal<sup>72</sup> noted an **imbalance in teacher deployment** between hilly areas, where there were often too many teachers, and the *terai*, where there were too few. Because of the political power of teacher unions, teachers could not be redeployed to the areas where they were needed. This is still the case today. Over the course of time, the pattern of teacher deployment has remained rigid while the spread of students has changed, and continues to change rapidly.

Over the last five years, the overall rate of enrolment has increased and there is generally huge overcrowding in Grade 1 classes. As this group proceeds through the school the demand for teachers will increase. The role of the unions in preventing rational deployment of teachers has made the government reluctant to recruit more permanent teachers and instead staff have been recruited on a 'temporary' basis. These teachers, recruited by the central government, receive the same salary as permanent staff but do not receive some other benefits such as pensions. The third category is staff recruited directly by the school.

The unions have recruited 'temporary' teachers into their ranks but it is the locally-recruited teaching posts that attract the most political attention because they offer the opportunity to place party cadres in paid jobs. With the huge expansion in student numbers, the number of such teaching posts is substantial. Typically the pattern of staffing observed in schools was 40% teachers from the permanent government cadre, 30% 'temporary' teachers and as many as 30% of teachers locally employed.

**Teacher absenteeism** is a serious problem but reliable data is difficult to come by. Studies indicate that absenteeism is largely seasonal (especially early departure and late reporting for duty after holiday periods) and that the practice is compounded by political factors which lead to under-reporting.<sup>73</sup> Field visits to schools confirmed that this practice was widespread and that even when teachers attended school they often arrived late and left early.

The problem of insufficient teachers is not only one of numbers and attendance. Teachers of **Science, Maths and English** are generally lacking in government schools. These are the subjects in which students most commonly fail in the SLC exam. The exam success of

<sup>72</sup> Vaux, Smith and Subba (2006)

<sup>73</sup> Foundation for Human Development (2004), Teachers Union of Nepal (2010)

private schools arises largely from emphasis on these subjects and particularly because they do much better in English, the language of instruction in private schools.

Except when local VDCs cover the costs, state schools are obliged to raise funds from parents to cover the deficit of teachers. In spite of government promises of **free education**, parents do not complain about this and officials turn a blind eye, acknowledging that there is no other way of addressing the problem. Schools typically recover the cost of additional teachers as annual fees to students in the Grades where extra teachers are employed. In effect, education remains largely free in Primary Schools (1-5) but charges are introduced in Secondary Grades, and even the government schools are practically self-financing in Grades 11-12. This is not inconsistent with the government focus on free basic (now meaning Grades 1-8) education.

The review of EFA in 2006 noted that while enrolment rates were steadily rising (and this trend has continued) the rates for retention and repetition were problematic. A significant reason for students to drop out of school is uncertainty whether it is worth staying for the full 10 years needed to reach the **SLC exam** at Grade 10 especially because the pass rate for students from government schools was very low (under 30% at that time). The issues received attention both from DPs and the media. Since then the pass rate has risen dramatically to over 60% in 2010 followed by a sudden fall to 46% in 2011. Since it is unlikely that either the exams or the students changed so dramatically over the period, the explanation must be sought elsewhere.

The key factor seems to be that the pass rate correlates with incentives. In 2006 financial incentives were introduced for schools with a pass rate above 50%.<sup>74</sup> This led to creation of new budgets controlled by DEOs, proportional to pass rates. Cheating has long been a problem in exams<sup>75</sup> but it appears to have become more widespread and has taken a systemic form within the last five years. Cheating takes two forms. Firstly there are cases of help to individual students by friends who may even sit the examination on their behalf. The second type is systemic cheating organised by teachers who may give out model answers in advance of the exam or write up key points on a board.

Officials have facilitated the process by turning a blind eye to cheating and by relaxing controls. Up to 2006, a failure in any of the eight subjects in the SLC exam led to failure overall and the necessity of retaking the entire exam a year later. Since then the rules for the exam have been relaxed. Failure in up to two subjects can be remedied by retaking the exam a few weeks later. In this process practically all students (who failed the exam a couple of weeks earlier) achieve a pass. The explanation put forward quite openly in interviews is that cheating takes place 'en masse' in the SLC retakes.

Because exams are normally held in government schools and are invigilated by teachers from government schools, it might be expected that the system would benefit students from those schools rather than private schools but, because practically all government teachers put their children into private schools, cheating often takes the form of government teachers cheating on behalf of private pupils. This may significantly contribute to the very high pass

<sup>74</sup> According to local reports, DEOs receive an incentive of Rs 1,00,000 if the SLC pass rate exceeds 50%.

<sup>75</sup> Mathema and Bista (2006)

rates of private schools (90% in 2011 compared with 46% for students from government schools). It also highlights the problem that the interests of teachers in government schools do not coincide with those of their students.

The **SSRP** has so far had little impact in schools. DEOs regarded it as a proposed policy and, because it was not enacted in law, could not form the basis of their work. They anticipated that future changes of government in Kathmandu could lead to changes. They were involved in the expansion of schools but constrained by lack of any new teachers to deploy. In effect, schools were moving ahead with their own resources and support from VDCs and DDCs. The roots of the problem of implementing the SSRP go back to the fundamental issue of teacher deployment. In some schools in hilly areas there are reported to be more teachers than students but they cannot be moved because of union protection. Without a rational deployment of teachers, DPs and the Ministry itself are reluctant to sanction new teaching posts. Demand for school expansion, as already noted, is not only coming from the SSRP but from local communities. A Primary School in Silichool (Rolpa District) has operated as a Secondary School for nearly a decade without being adopted by government. It receives informal help from government in terms of 'temporary' teachers and some funds for buildings but is left with a substantial deficit on running costs. The SMC Chairman said that he was reluctant to charge fees because he wanted the school to be adopted by government rather than go private. This left the school in an extremely tight financial position. Nevertheless the SLC pass rate was very high and, because a large number of teachers were locally recruited, there seemed to be none of the usual problems of teacher discipline. The SMC was able to take real control over (and responsibility for) the school. This indicates that local management can be made to work: but the institutional issue of union politicisation must be tackled for this to happen on a wide scale.

### 3.3 Private Education

Over the last decade, private schools have extended their presence from the Kathmandu Valley and major towns (where they were limited during the conflict) into small towns and along the main roads. Occasionally private schools are also found in remote villages. The main attractions of private schools are better exam results, use of English as the medium of instruction (leading to better job prospects), status and social connections.

Teachers in the public sector are generally better qualified and better paid than those in the private sector, the infrastructure of government schools is generally better and the curriculum is more sophisticated.<sup>76</sup> There is a very wide range of private schools and large variations in cost. The cheaper private schools focus very strongly on rote-learning for exam passes.

Private schools have extended their attraction because government schools fail to perform for reasons outlined above –primarily the lack of control over teachers. Private school proprietors generally seek to prevent the activity of unions and where SMCs exist in private schools they seem to be dominated by the proprietors. Teachers are subject to a 'hire and fire' system which enables the school management to control them very tightly and make them work harder than is generally the case with teachers in the public sector. Costs are

<sup>76</sup> In Kathmandu there are a few elite schools with much better facilities than government schools. We are talking here about the general mass of schools outside Kathmandu.

driven down by paying teachers much less than government teachers (commonly about two thirds and without any other benefits) and demanding more regular attendance, willingness to cope with large amounts of homework and more intensive teaching schedules.

Although there are private schools with excellent facilities, especially in Kathmandu, elsewhere private schools are dominated by issues of cost and profit. The infrastructure of private schools observed during this study is generally worse than that of government schools. While most government schools have added several earthquake-resistant modern buildings since the end of conflict in 2006, some private schools operate in appalling temporary buildings and others are poorly maintained.

### **The issue of social status**

A private school housed in tin shacks in a remote part of Rolpa District was drawing students away from a nearby government school with new buildings and well qualified and committed government teachers. The teachers attributed this trend to parents' desire for status. They noted that several children had come back to the government school because their parents ran out of money. In another case a private school had opened near another very good government school but later closed down again. Head-teachers in these schools were considering the possibility of opening up English-medium streams in their Primary Schools.

Parents investing in education make different choices for different children, with particularly strong variation between girls and boys. This has led to a preponderance of boys in private school and an increasing ratio of girls in government schools. Parents with similar incomes may make different choices depending on the position of education within other priorities such as funding a migrant or building a house. Changing economic circumstances may result in children switching from public to private education and back again. But it is more difficult to switch children into private school after the initial Grades because of English as the language of instruction. A parent in Silgadhi lamented that he could not put his daughters into private school (although he could now afford it) because they were too old to start in English medium. Parents said they were more confident about challenging teachers in private schools (where they were paying) compared with government schools where they perceived themselves as recipients of a free service.

The private/public debate raises the question of what is education quality. One of the teachers from the government school in Kirtipur argued that producing high pass rates in the SLC exams did not necessarily reflect what the young people of Nepal should be learning. He pointed out that the private school graduates have very little knowledge and understanding about Nepali society, culture and politics as compared to those who graduate from government schools. A deputy-head teacher from a private school argued that private schools were contributing to the national economy by educating children from economically privileged families who would otherwise have sent their children to schools in India. They provide value for the money invested in the education sector and provide employment to a large number of an educated workforce. He argued that there is a better professional practice in private schools because teacher absenteeism is not an issue.

In Kapilvastu, in the *terai*, there is a clear social divide between public and private schools. In the government school 95 percent of children are Tharu (an indigenous group) and it is often referred to as the 'Tharu school' whereas the private school next door was attended

predominantly (96 percent) by children from Pahade (Hindu castes from hilly areas) background and known colloquially as the 'Pahade school'.

Although most private schools are secular, profit-making institutions there are other categories including religious schools. In Nepalganj (Banke District) the DEO drew attention to the specific problem of Madrassa (Muslim) schools. Although in the past these schools have remained separate from the government system they now seek integration. According to the DEO this may have arisen because, with large families, Muslims are finding it too expensive to maintain the Madrassas and hope to secure access to government funding. Government policy allows for one subject to be chosen by the local school and this policy allows religious education to continue in such schools provided that they also follow the full national curriculum.

### 3.4 School Management

The position of SMC Chair provides a significant opportunity to control resources and extend patronage networks. While the SMC Chair may have strong political links, this is not so evident in the case of Head-teachers. This arrangement makes it possible for the two key figures to work together. In theory the SMC Chair focuses on funding issues and external relations while the Head-teacher focuses on teaching issues and the internal management of the school. In practice one or other is dominant. SMC Chairs usually take the lead in the (highly politicised) *terai* while Head-teachers appear more likely to take the lead in the hilly areas.

#### Why are SMCs politicised?

- There is a political vacuum at local level due to the absence of local government. As government institutions schools provide a platform for exercising local level political power. Political parties endeavour to maintain their local profile through representation on the SMCs.
- Holding SMC positions, particularly the 'Chair' provides social and political status which contributes to a political career in the party.
- Schools have become places for expanding political ideologies. SMCs can influence teachers, students and parents to pursue their political agendas.
- Schools receive direct funds from government and the SMCs have influence on how to manage those funds. Supporting investment in school development (e.g. building classrooms) helps political representatives gain social credibility.
- SMCs are not clear about their roles and do not receive any training.

Close collaboration between the SMC Chair and Head-teacher can mitigate political problems and establish a level of discipline in the school. Problems usually revolve around financial issues such as:

- The current expansion of schools into higher Grades presents opportunities for contracting work;

- The Per Capita Fee (PCF) paid to the school by the Ministry;
- Relations with DEOs and VDC/DDC Secretaries;
- Teacher recruitment;
- Opportunities to dispose of or manage school lands and property;
- Charges to parents for local employment of teachers.

Especially in the *terai*, securing the position of SMC Chair has become the subject of intense political competition especially where there are school lands and properties. In the absence of elections for DDCs and VDCs, the election of SMC Chairs presents practically the only opportunity for political parties to measure their strength. The ferocity of these elections may arise from this factor rather than from any concern for education.

### **Public Education in the Terai**

A government school in Kailali District had experienced a loss of more than half of its students over three years. The number of teachers had remained the same because teacher unions and political parties had connived to protect them from transfer. In spite of this excess of teachers, nearly half the classes in the schools were observed to be lacking a teacher. If a teacher was absent no work had been set for the children and no other teacher made an effort to provide cover. Teachers were observed chatting in the sun while students sat in the classroom with nothing to do.

In one class a boy described as a trainee teacher was standing in front of the class uncertain what to do and lacking any support or supervision from the other teachers. There were few students in the higher classes but two primary classes (amounting to over 120 students) had been merged into one with a single teacher. The Head-teacher said he was unable to manage the teachers because of political involvements and the power of the unions.

In this school, a recent dispute about the SMC Chair election had escalated into stone-throwing. A group of parents interviewed separately said that they were well aware of these failings and disturbances but could do nothing about it. The DEO said that the most he could achieve was to prevent any escalation of violence by mediating with the SMC Chairman and political parties but he lacked any powers of enforcement.

DEOs are unable to stand up to the teacher unions and this undermines the work of the Supervisors who are supposed to monitor the schools and of Resource Persons supposed to provide training support to teachers. In the *terai* most of the officials have given up the attempt to do their job and remain in the District office. The situation in hilly areas is more positive.

In theory the SMC should reflect a wide range of stakeholder interests, including representatives of women and dalits. In practice the SMC is run by the SMC Chair. We found no example of an SMC working in line with the regulations. Parents expressed reluctance to question teachers. In general students were also found to be docile even in the face of flagrant abuse by teachers such as long absences and late arrival in class. In only a



few cases were students willing to go and call teachers who were loitering in the staff-room. In Rolpa we witnessed the lock-out of a head-teacher followed by a complaint from students in the open assembly about an absent teacher. The Head-teacher's assurances that the teacher would rapidly return appeared to be accepted. In some schools NGOs have encouraged student groups to try to improve the quality of education by developing Codes of Conduct and other means. In some areas, NGOs working with parents and students have declared schools as Zones of Peace and insisted that political activity and gang violence is kept out of the school. This appears to work quite well when there is a recognisable external body to negotiate with and was particularly effective in relation to school closures caused by the Madhesi Movement, but is less effective in relation to internal management problems and against local violence.

### 3.5 Teachers and Teaching

The practice of rote-learning is not derived from national teacher training courses or from the curriculum. Both discourage such an approach. It appears to be largely a response to the exam system. This includes not only the SLC exam at Grade 10 but the annual exams that dictate whether a student moves to the next Grade. Teachers interpret their task as making sure that students pass these exams. There is little emphasis on development of thought processes or reflection on society. This creates a major discrepancy between the theory of education in Nepal and its practice. While further effort to reform the exam system might help, the fundamental obstacle may lie in social attitudes that condone a 'rote-learning' and 'exam-led' approach. Even though teachers and parents may be exposed to other ideas they tend to revert to these limited stereotypes. Rather than transform society, the education system seems to be drawn back to the past.

#### Quality Education

Parents in Kapilvastu felt that there was no pressure to enforce quality teaching at primary level. It was not unusual to find children in Grade 5 (9 - 10 years) still struggling to read and write Nepali. Such young children could not raise voice against teacher absenteeism or put pressure on the management to ensure that their course is delivered properly. They thought that officials were only concerned with SLC exams and paid little or no attention to children's achievement at primary level. Teachers said that the poor level of students coming into secondary schools made it necessary to resort to cheating in order to pass the SLC exam.

The crucial actor in bringing about positive change is the Head-teacher. A charismatic Head-teacher can make a significant difference. This immense responsibility perhaps deserves better recognition from the education system. One Head-teacher told us that he is paid the same as a Higher Secondary teacher except for an extra allowance of just Rs500 (less than \$9) per month. This does not adequately reflect the increasing responsibilities of Head-teachers coping with current complexities of politicisation, competition with private schools, charging and expansion.

Schools will also need to face the full implications of federalism and the increasing demand for education in the 'mother tongue'. There is considerable debate and difference of opinion on this issue. There is widespread agreement that the old textbooks created tensions by promoting the notion of Nepal as a 'Hindu Kingdom' largely ignoring the history and culture of non-Hindu and indigenous groups, or reducing them to subservient stereotypes. Revision of the curriculum and textbooks over the last five years has largely succeeded in eliminating the extremes, although the full range of diversity in Nepal is not yet fully recognised.

There is much less agreement about the issue of education in the 'mother tongue'. Because this is now asserted as a right under the Constitution the Ministry of Education has moved forward to develop textbooks in around a dozen languages and multi-lingual education has been piloted in selected schools. It is generally assumed that Nepali would be taught in all cases although not always as the language of instruction. The key question is whether education in the 'mother tongue' can or should replace Nepali right through the system. An advantage is that students are likely to do better in their 'mother tongue' than in Nepali, which for many is essentially a foreign language. Arguably, the main linguistic groups could be recognised for jobs in government and local business. The disadvantage is that such students might not reach a good enough level in Nepali to communicate across the whole country. Some observers consider that the move will boost ethnic diversity while others see it as a route to the break-up of the country.

The General Secretary of an NGO based in Kathmandu representing the Limbu people (a large linguistic group in the East) considered that education in the 'mother tongue' was really a political ploy intended to gain support from ethnic groups. He said that if a political party promised education in the 'mother tongue' the others would have to follow for fear of losing support from that group but there has been no serious debate about the issues. He expressed concern that DPs (and the Ministry) were pressing ahead in advance of a proper and dispassionate consultation. Teachers and Head Teachers generally argued that it was useful for teachers in pre-primary and primary Grade 1 to understand the local language in order to help children who had difficulty with Nepali but the objective was to help them make the transfer rather than persist in the 'mother tongue'. This practice appeared to be quite widespread in the classrooms.

### 3.6. Poverty and Social Inclusion

As noted in Section One, direct social exclusion based on gender, religion, ethnicity and caste has reduced considerably.<sup>77</sup> This was generally confirmed by our field studies although the issue remains a concern in parts of the *terai*. The continuing problem is not overt discrimination but the lack of contacts and social skills associated with the classes controlling jobs and opportunities. Because of the dominance of 'informal governance' it is not possible to get a job without connections or by using bribery. This leaves the have-nots, especially those from minorities, at a severe disadvantage (see Box below).

Scholarships were not thought to have played a very significant role except in boosting the enrolment statistics for primary schools. Political parties have now pledged to give scholarships to all girls and, since the funds disbursed do not make this possible (typically

<sup>77</sup> Sharma, J R and Donini, A (2010) *Towards a Great Transformation –the Maoist insurgency and perceptions of social transformation in Nepal*, Tufts University

50% of what is required), schools select the children to receive the scholarship. In many cases this is not done according to need but according to influence.

The public do not necessarily agree with the government's priorities for dalits and girls. Students in one secondary school felt that it was unfair to provide scholarships to some but not others when all children lived in similar economic conditions. Government attempts to cover other minority groups have led to a very complicated system. In practice SMC Chairs often make their own arbitrary decisions how to use the scholarship money. In Dhanusha, scholarship money was spent on the purchase of school uniform for all school children.

Although larger number of girls are enrolling for school their ambitions and educational outcomes have not necessarily changed. Social custom has changed to the extent that a small amount of education may be an advantage in relation to marriage but it makes no other difference in women's lives. Female students reported that early-age marriage remained the main risk to their educational future. Out of 13 girls consulted in a secondary school, only two thought they would go to higher secondary school and all expected to be married before the age of twenty. Small incentives such as a scholarship may encourage enrolment but as soon as girls can work there is pressure for them to marry (and leave home) in order to relieve demands on family resources. Under the dowry system, wedding expenses become much higher for educated girls. Instead of transforming these practices, the education system has simply adapted to them.

**Does education improve opportunities for minority groups?**

*My father spent most of his life as a 'haruwa' (bonded labour) working for a landlord. He did not want me to live the hard life he did so he sent me to school hoping that I would be able to get a job. I completed my school and gained a B.Ed. thinking that I would become a teacher. I have also obtained teaching licence for both primary and secondary level. Many temporary teaching posts come up in different schools but I have no links or political connections. I have tried everywhere but it has become impossible to find a job.*

*I am the only educated person in my community but I do exactly the same kinds of jobs (manual work, farming, daily wage labour work, etc.) that other uneducated people do. So, I am no different from other young people who did not complete their school. It feels like I wasted my time by going to college. Education has made me more conscious than those who are uneducated in my society but economic conditions of my family remain the same and my father still works as a poorly paid labourer. So, being educated does not really make me any better.*

Interview, Kapilvastu

## Section Four: Implications for Development Partners (DPs)

### 4.1 Overview

For a summary of PEA findings see the diagram at the end of this Section.

The Macro-analysis (Section One) indicates that the present fundamental problem of teacher deployment is unlikely to change. The politicisation of unions is an integral part of the current political situation. Support from teachers is very important to the political parties: calls to de-politicise education are not wholly realistic. Failure to tackle the teacher deployment issue will continue to undermine the quality of government education and increase the divide between private and public schools. Remittances from migrants abroad appear likely to exacerbate this trend.

The attempt, endorsed by many DPs, to increase the downward accountability of schools to communities will be limited by the parties' apparent determination to strengthen the bureaucracy and control education through their dominance at the centre. Both of these extremes (strong central control and vigorous community involvement) are unlikely to come about but a combination of better central control of officials (at least to the extent of rooting out blatant corruption) and stronger community involvement to improve teacher performance may help to make modest improvements.

On a more positive note, a number of Head Teachers have found ways to operate successfully within the system and some SMC Chairs have been able to mobilise local funding sources in order to improve and expand the schools. There is a very strong divide between the *terai*, where public education is in an appalling state and the hilly areas where conditions are variable but generally acceptable. To an extent the *terai* is being marginalised because too many teachers are located in hilly areas.

The SSRP and other centrally managed processes in the education sector have little impact on schools. This follows the general finding that 'informal governance' drives out 'formal governance'. Whatever is envisaged through formal policies and processes is undermined by the hidden effects surrounding patronage and politics.

A second important finding is that bilateral aid, while intended to support 'formal governance' is distorted towards 'informal governance'. DP's have provided substantial funding for public education but the outcome is poor because political patronage has not been addressed. Arguably, the public education system is run as a source of patronage for the political parties and they resist any attempt to set this right. It is questionable whether DPs should continue to finance such a system.

Thirdly, the report indicates that instead of addressing fundamental problems the system is capable of adjusting to DP targets by manipulating processes such as exams. Processes are being adjusted to give the required results and incentives (often hidden) influence the data. Cheating in exams has become institutionalised in order to meet targets set by DPs and public expectations.

Fourthly, changes in society have reduced the incidence of discrimination along lines of identity and led to greater demand for education especially for girls. The education system has contributed to this but in a superficial way, through incentives or scholarships, rather than through a transformative approach to diversity in the education system. Although textbooks have been brought up to date in a post 'Hindu Kingdom' era, teachers seem unable to teach in a way that challenges long-standing beliefs and social structures.

Finally, the education system reflects a focus on selfish objectives rather than the good of society. From teacher absenteeism to cheating in exams students learn that patronage and wealth confer impunity while those from poorer backgrounds are barred from progress.

#### **4.2. Scope for action**

Unless DPs have access to data that is more reliable than the Flash Reports submitted through the education line management they will not even be aware of the problems, let alone find solutions. It was a serious mistake for DPs to phase out independent monitoring in 2007 simply on the basis that in one year (and one year only) the figures from the monitoring coincided quite well with those from government. In the previous years the discrepancies had been substantial and our study indicates that official statistics continue to be an unreliable guide.

DPs themselves have an interest in positive results. It is gratifying to report that progress is being made and perhaps to claim some responsibility for that improvement. The bearer of bad news is likely to be blamed, even in aid agencies. This tendency may have been exacerbated by the influence of the Paris Declaration of 2005 with its emphasis on Alignment with the national government. Nepal is best considered as a Fragile State requiring a cautious approach in line with the OECD-DAC Principles.

DPs should be particularly cautious about promoting any specific agendas on technical grounds alone but must take full account of the political context in which debates take place. The most sensitive issues relate to federalism and the use of the 'mother tongue'.

The Supreme Court has recently delivered a judgment that in order to meet the Constitutional requirement of free 'basic' education, and taking into account the government's pledge to extend 'basic' education through three extra Grades under the SSRP, the government must increase spending on education by more than 20%. This has led to pressure on DPs to fill the gap. But instead of doing so, DPs should expose the enormous inefficiencies of the current system and especially the imbalances in deployment of teachers.

DPs should keep their focus on the issue of deployment of teachers and set in place a monitoring system that will enable them to assess the problem more accurately and track any progress. DPs may also have to consider dividing their support more evenly between the education SWAp and support through NGOs to strengthen local school management and encourage a greater level of bottom-up accountability.

At the same time DPs should relate their funding of the education SWAp to progress towards holding elections at VDC and DDC levels. Without elected local bodies the political pressures on school management have become unbearable. It is unlikely that any significant progress can be made in education until elected local government is re-established.

In the light of all the above DPs should maintain a broad focus on education and its role in society rather than get drawn into a narrow consideration of the SSRP, which ultimately has no formal status in law and may be reversed by the new Constitution or by future political leadership.

#### 4.3. Summary of actions requested from the Ministry of Education<sup>78</sup>

1. Recognising that formal governance is undermined by informal governance, the Ministry should recognise the limitations of the civil service and welcome the engagement of non-government actors in monitoring performance at all levels and providing an independent audit;
2. Specifically, the Ministry should cooperate with a DP-led process of independent monitoring and use this to check biases that may occur in the formal data;
3. The Ministry should cooperate with and encourage independent monitoring missions at District level, such as groups of journalists, human rights activists, lawyers etc;
4. At school level the Ministry should welcome the activities of NGOs seeking to improve school performance by supporting SMCs and by increasing the participation of students and parents in school management;
5. The Ministry should give special priority to the 'social audit' process, ensuring that this takes place in a satisfactory manner at least annually;
6. The Ministry should focus on the issue of teacher deployment and management. As a first step, it should develop a national plan in association with the unions to address the most extreme cases of imbalance and the general imbalance between schools in hilly areas and the *terai*;
7. Building on the new national framework of Schools as Zones of Peace, the Ministry should seek to develop coalitions of organisations to limit school closures and violence especially in the *terai*;
8. The Ministry should put its weight firmly behind the case for local elections at VDC and DDC levels;
9. The Ministry should investigate sudden variations in SLC exam pass rates and conduct a review of exam practices.

#### 4.4. Summary of Recommendations to DPs

36. DPs should take every opportunity to challenge 'informal governance';
37. Equip themselves with reliable and independent sources of information;
38. Insist on the central importance of tackling issues of teacher deployment and management;
39. Insist on elections at VDC and DDC levels as a pre-requisite for their support;
40. Make full use of independent and NGO channels to monitor, challenge and improve public education especially by increasing public participation;
41. Strengthen efforts to limit violence and school closure (especially in the *terai*) such as Schools as Zones of Peace.
42. Recognise that the SSRP is only an element (and not a very important one) within the wider education system;

<sup>78</sup> These proposals are put forward in response to a direct request to do so from the Ministry

43. Be cautious in relation to targets and incentives including the MDGs as these can lead to distortions and deceptions;
44. Be cautious in relation to issues such as education charges and instruction in the 'mother tongue' and modify a technical approach with understanding of political factors;
45. Commission ongoing research into the exam system in order to identify and eliminate irregular practices.

<b>PEA DRIVERS</b> <b>Centralisation of power and resources</b> <b>Politicisation of the education sector and schooling</b> <b>Patronage based on political affiliation, social status and wealth</b>			
<b>Education Policy Area</b>	<b>Perceived problems and some technical solutions that have been suggested</b>	<b>PEA explanation</b>	<b>Questions for DPs</b>
<b>DEOs</b>	Although further resources have been devolved to District level, DEOs operate under intense pressure from the political parties and this is increased because elected DDCs and VDCs are lacking. DEOs are subject to transfer if they do not work with the political entities. This often leads to compromise and corruption. Particularly in the <i>terai</i> DEOs come under threat of violence. DEOs are unable to perform their tasks of supervision and monitoring.	The problem lies in the centralisation of the political parties. DEOs have little manoeuvre with local political agents who are directed from Kathmandu. These agents are not susceptible to pressure from local communities.	The parties appear to favour strengthened DEOs and greater central control over them. DPs should counteract this by strengthening local accountability by insisting on VDC and DDC elections and by strengthening the involvement of local communities in schools
<b>SMCs</b>	SMCs have significant power over resources including school funds and appointment of local teachers. The SMC is often dominated by the Chair. Technical training of the SMC is often seen as the answer.	The SMC Chair post is highly politicised. Technical training alone may not necessarily lead to better outcomes. Sustained effort to mobilise the local community may also be needed	Elected VDCs and DDCs are an essential first step. Further sustained work at school level through NGOs may be needed to achieve greater involvement of the community. This should be focused on monitoring and social audit
<b>Private schools</b>	The high exam pass rate of private schools has exposed the weakness of public education and should give urgency to efforts to address the issue of teacher management. Private school offer better job prospects not only through better exam results but by offering access to elite groups.	Using English as the medium of instruction, private schools create a sharp social divide which perpetuates the problem of 'informal governance'.	The question why bright students from the government schools still have poor job prospects deserves further scrutiny. DPs could usefully research this issue;
<b>Teachers</b>	Permanent teachers cannot be effectively managed because of their links with the politicised unions.	Political parties are unlikely to forego their links with teachers because these are crucial to success in elections.	DPs could do further research on the inefficiencies caused by this issue. Arguably, DP funding should be withheld until it is addressed



<b>Language of instruction</b>	Government has committed to providing language of instruction in the mother tongue, but there is confusion about what this means in practice. The debate is complicated by moves towards federalism.	Political populism and desire for support from ethnic groups has given this debate a strong political character. There are strong grounds to support the expression of diversity but this cannot be disconnected from politics.	DPs should be very cautious and recognise that technical solutions must be modified by an understanding of the political realities.
<b>Education standards and examinations</b>	Changes in the rate of SLC pass indicate that cheating has become systemic. There is a danger that students and teachers will conclude that proper study is unnecessary.	This issue clearly demonstrates how incentives can distort a formal governance system. In this case the problem is not only local bribery but the desire of officials to meet targets.	DPs should learn that targets must be applied with caution. This applies to the MDGs. DPs should maintain a broad focus on quality education rather than allow specific measures to dominate.

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